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introduction + credits

☼

Hey y'all!

So I'm back with the next book in the Trail of Shadows arc, Fading Shadows! There are a few little things I'd like to discuss before the story begins.
Firstly I wanna say thank you in advance to everyone who has read Dark Shadows, and to those who have stuck around till now. Seriously so much love goes to you readers.

Secondly, I have had many questions on if there will be more books that deal with the Trail of Shadows universe. This is my ***official announcement*** *that there will be* ***two*** *more books in the Ttail of Shadows arc, as well as a in depth character guide, two stand alone books, and a special novella book.*

Keep an eye out for an announcement on my wall about series updates, new content, and more!
Anyways, get ready for a new adventure with new characters and more of your favorites!

Loves
Skyfeather_21

☼ ***ATTENTION*** ☼

ALL CREDITS *FOR WARRIORS AND THE WARRIORS FRANCHISE GOES TO ERIN HUNTER.*
THS IS A WORK OF FANFICTION AND I IN NO WAY TAKE CREDIT FOR ANY OF THE CANON CLANS OR THE ORIGINAL WARRIORS SERIES.

I ONLY CLAIM MY OCS AND MY PLOT IDEAS. THAT IS ALL.

THANK YOU ♡

playlist + character themes

OFFICIAL PLAYLIST

☼

pierre : *ryn weaver*
run baby run : *the rigs*
ghost of you : *5 seconds of summer*
where's my love : *syml*
mr. loverman : *ricky montgomery*
lightning : *mehro*
king & lionheart : *of mice & men*
cinnamon : *jome*
everytime we touch : *cicada, yanou*
listen to your heart : *dht, edmee*
willow : *jasmine thompson*
i see the light : *mandy moore, zach levi*
so far away - acoustic : *adam christopher*
two birds : *regina spektor*
eet : *regina spektor*
renegades : *x ambassadors*
gotta go my own way : *erica lane*
soldier : *fleurie*
another love : *tom odell*
thistle & weeds : *mumford & sons*
war of hearts (acoustic) : *ruelle*
alps : *novo amor, ed tullett*
heart like yours : *williamette stone*
love the way you lie pt. II : *rihanna*
unfaithful : *rihanna*
battle cry : *imagine dragons*
accidentally in love : *kid rain*
lights are on *: tom rosenthal*
the devil within *: digital daggers*

blood // water *: grandson*

☼

CHARACTER THEMES

the character theme songs that represent their relationships with others and give us a small glimpse into what their personality is like through music and lyrics.

☼

protagonistic themes

the main songs for each pairing/relationship highlighted in fading shadows.

☆

rainbreeze + bramblestorm

i see the light : mandy moore, zach levi
"*And the world has somehow shifted*
All at once everything looks different
Now that I see you"

heart like yours : williamette stone
"*How can a heart like yours ever love a heart like mine?*"

☆

cinderflame + tigerfrost

war of hearts (acoustic) : ruelle
"*I can't help but want you*
I know that I'd die without you"

everytime we touch : cicada, yanou
"*Cause everytime we touch, I get this feeling. Everytime we kiss I swear I can fly.*"

☆

stormfall + sandfeather

accidentally in love : kid rain
"*So she said what's the problem baby?*
What's the problem I don't know; Well maybe I'm in love"

pierre : ryn weaver
"*I found me a lover who plays the bass. He's kinda quiet but his body ain't"*

---

antagonistic themes

the main themes of the darker relationships highlighted in fading shadows. Mainly focused on the relationships of the dark forest mentors and their living apprentices, alongside the darker interactions of the clans.

☆

duskheart + cinderpaw

the devil within : digital daggers
"*You won't suspect a thing*
You won't see me in the mirror
But I crept into your heart,"

☆

cherryfang + bramblestorm

blood // water : grandson
"*We'll never get free; Lamb to the slaughter.*
What you gon' do
When there's blood in the water?"

☆

honeypool + cinderpaw

she : dodie
"And she smells like lemongrass and sleep
*She tastes like apple juice and peac*h"

☆

stormpaw + bramblestorm

hurricane / 30 seconds to mars
"*Tell me would you kill to prove you're right?*
Tell me would you kill to save your life?"

allegiances part one

Thunderclan

Leader: Mudstar- massive dark brown tom with green eyes and battle scarred ears
(apprentice Tawnypaw)

Deputy: Dustyleaf- wiry, pale brown tom with dark tabby stripes, green eyes

Medicine cat: Snowfall- small long haired pale grey and white patched tom with pale blue eyes

Ravensight- thin black tomcat with pale greenish grey eyes

Warriors

Larktail- lean grey and white shecat with yellow eyes

Meadowheart- cloudy grey tabby shecat with light green eyes

Redpelt- dark ginger Tom with amber eyes and long whiskers.

Violetshine- pretty tortoiseshell shecat with pale green eyes and distinctive pale ginger spots on her back. Former loner named Violet.

Thistlefang- broad shouldered golden brown tabby tom with amber eyes, darker tabby stripes, and various battle scars

Lightningtail- long legged black tom with golden eyes
(apprentice Featherpaw)

Sparrowstrike- stocky dark brown tom with amber eyes and a battle scarred pelt.
(apprentice Bramblepaw)

Nightmist- long haired black shecat with green eyes

(apprentice Honeypaw)

Foxfang- a russet furred tom with green eyes and a bushy tail

Wrenflight- wiry brown tabby shecat with yellow eyes and a striking cream chest.

Shrewtail- dark brown tabby tom

Spiderclaw- black tom with green eyes and lighter brown legs and underbelly

Oakfur- light brown tabby tom

Kestralfeather- dark ginger shecat with white paws

Specklednose- pretty dappled shecat
(apprentice Blossompaw)

Falconstrike- large black tomcat with copper eyes and especially long claws
(apprentice Tigerpaw)

Pinefur- a dark brown tom with black tabby markings, hazel eyes.

Mistyrain- pretty grey shecat with tawny eyes. Formerly of Riverclan

Owlflame- muscular dappled brown tom with fierce yellow eyes

Oakpelt- sandy grey tabby tom with black paws

Daisytuft- light brown tabby shecat with white chest and paws, blue eyes.

Duskpetal: grey shecat with lighter chest and green eyes

Smokefang: lean black and grey tabby tom with yellow eyes

Sparkfire - a ginger tabby tomcat with golden eyes

Thornheart - dark brown tom with green eyes and faint tabby markings.

Ashwind- dark ginger tom (with darker flecks), green eyes.

Apprentices

Blossompaw- tall dark tabby shecat with pale gold eyes (daughter of Shrewtail and Wrenflight)

Featherpaw- small cream tabby shecat with white paws (daughter of Shrewtail and Wrenflight)

Tawnypaw- long legged brown shecat with copper eyes and black swirled tabby markings (daughter of Shrewtail and Wrenflight)

Honeypaw- lean light brown tabby shecat with yellow eyes and white paws (daughter of Daisytuft and Oakfur)

Bramblepaw- handsome spiky furred light brown tabby tom with green eyes and distinctive black stripes (son of Daisytuft and Oakfur)

Tigerpaw- broad shouldered black tabby tom with dark blue eyes (son of Oakpelt and Specklednose)

Queens

Cherrythorn- dark ginger shecat (with darker flecks), pale green eyes. Former rogue named Cherry.

Briarleap-long haired tortoiseshell shecat with amber eyes. Mother of Spiderclaw's kits: Petalkit, a pretty brown tabby shecat, Breezekit, a large dark grey tabby tomcat with ice blue eyes and Hazelkit, a tabby and white shecat with blue eyes

Sagefern- pretty grey shecat with hazel eyes. Mother of Lightningtail's kits: Hawkkit, a black and grey tabby tom, and Lionkit, a grey tomkit with black paws and yellow eyes.

Skyfeather- delicately built long haired silver and white tabby shecat with pale blue eyes. Mother of Thistlefang's kits, Rainkit, a blue-grey shecat with light blue eyes, Cinderkit, a stocky thick furred silver tabby shecat with copper colored eyes, and Stormkit, a broad shouldered golden brown tabby tom with clear hazel eyes

Elders

Lionclaw-bracken colored tom with hazel eyes and a long tail. Has a large scar across his shoulders

Willowstep- long legged pale tabby shecat with green eyes and sleek fur.

Mossheart- tortoiseshell tom, Former rogue named Moss.

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Shadowclan

Leader- Dawnstar- fiery ginger shecat with pale green eyes.

Deputy- Newtfang- dark grey tabby tom with amber eyes
(Apprentice Petalpaw)

Medicine cat- Poppyleaf- pretty golden shecat
(apprentice Seedpaw)

Warriors

Alderheart- light grey tabby tom

Berrysplash- cream colored shecat with green eyes and an especially long tail
(apprentice Ivypaw)

Addertail- a large ginger Tom with black paws

Heatherleaf- a wiry black shecat with green eyes.
(apprentice Russetpaw)

Rustfang- dark ginger tom

Jaggedfur- brown tabby tom with unruly fur and blue eyes. Former kittypet named Jack.
(apprentice Sparkpaw)

Cloversplash - a small cream colored shecat with darker dream tabby spots.

Dustheart- dark ginger tomcat

Sedgefoot- black tabby tom
(apprentice Rockpaw)

Apprentices

Ivypaw- tawny and white shecat (daughter of Dawnstar and Addertail)

Seedpaw-- dappled cream colored shecat with green eyes and black paws (daughter of Dawnstar and Addertail)

Petalpaw- light ginger tabby she at with cream colored paws and pale green eyes (daughter of Dawnstar and Addertail)

Russetpaw- reddish tabby tomcat (son of Cloversplash and Rustfang)

Sparkpaw- dark ginger tabby tomcat (son of Rustfang and Cloversplash)

Rockpaw- deep ginger tomcat (son of Cloversplash and Rustfang)

Queens

Honeyheart- pretty grey shecat with green eyes. Mother of Jaggedfur's kit: Bramblekit- creamy brown tom with white paws and green eyes, and Bumblekit, a grey tabby tom with white patches along his pelt

Elders

Sunflame- large pale brown Tom with golden eyes

Doveflight- small, black shecat with green eyes and a white spot on her chest

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Riverclan

Leader- Rainstar- pale gray shecat (with darker flecks), dark blue

eyes.

Deputy- Bristletail- large brown tomcat with green eyes and an especially scruffy pelt.

Medicine cat- Streamheart- grey tom with blue eyes and black paws, ears and muzzle.
(apprentice Mossypaw)

Warriors

Shadowfang -black Tom with white patches and blue eyes

Rosecloud- a pure white shecat with long legs and blue eyes

Brackenclaw- grey-brown Tom

Beetlewhisker- cream tabby Tom with distinct black stripes

Rushheart- lanky brown tabby tomcat

Liontail- black tom with green eyes
(apprentice Ashpaw)

Jayheart- golden tabby tom with amber eyes
(Apprentice Fernpaw)

Apprentices

Mossypaw- pretty brown shecat with yellow eyes

Fernpaw - pretty dappled tawny furred shecay with soft blue eyes

Queens

Tansytail- a grey shecat with Amber eyes. Mother of Bumblefoot's kits: Yarrowkit - cream colored shecat and Splashkit- grey tomcat

Hollyfur- long haired black shecat with blue eyes. Mother of Bristletail's kits: Ashkit, a speckled grey shecat with copper eyes and Finchkit, a golden tabby shecat

Elders

Dewleap- a black and white patched Tom with green eyes

Honeystrike- striking cream colored shecat with blue eyes

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Windclan

Leader:Thornstar- dark ginger Tom with amber eyes,

Deputy: Amberwind- dark ginger shecat
(apprentice Moonpaw)

Medicine cat: Jayflight- dark brown tomcat with pale blue eyes
(apprentice Sorrelpaw!

Warriors

Furzetail -a mottled tabby Tom

Rocktail - a black Tom with green eyes

Cloudyheart - dark grey and white tabby shecat

Finchfang - brown tabby tom with blue eyes
(Apprentice Sparkpaw)

Eagleclaw- stocky dark brown tomcat with blue eyes

Rabbitheart- light brown tabby shecat
(apprentice Poppypaw)

Apprentices

Sparkpaw- dark ginger shecat

Poppypaw- a golden brown tabby shecat with white paws

Sorrelpaw: lanky white she-cat with green eyes

Moonpaw - grey tabby shecat with yellow eyes

Queens

Hazelstep - a grey-brown shecat with pale golden colored eyes, mother of Finchfang's kit: Tallkit- large black tomcat. adoptive mother to Rabbitkit, a brown and white tom, and Sootkit, a dark brown tom.

Cats Outside the Clans

Bird- lanky brown Tom

Raintail- black shecat with blue eyes. Formerly of Thunderclan

Creek- massive black tom with Amber eyes.

Sammy- black and white tom with green eyes

Skyclan(modern)

Russet- old dark ginger tom with hazel eyes and powerful hind legs. (Russetsky)

Spots -speckled shecat with a solid ginger tail and blue eyes

Scrap- tiny white and black Tom with pale yellow eyes

Nettle- a black and white Tom

Miles- brown tom with blue eyes, former kittypet

Red- a ginger tabby shecat with green eyes

Charlie- a lanky brown Tom with blue eyes. kittypet

Sorrel- ginger and white shecat with Amber eyes

Daisy- brown and white shecat,

Soot- dark grey, almost black tom with dark blue eyes and lighter grey paws.

Thrush- sand colored tom with green eyes and long whiskers

Sand- light brown tabby shecat with lighter colored paws

Sage- small white shecat with green eyes

Mouse- little grey tabby tom with long whiskers, kittypet

Ancient Skyclan

Leader: Minnowstar- large grey tabby tomcat

Deputy: Firefang- fierce ginger tomcat

Medicine cat: Dewtail- small grey shecat with blue eyes

Adderheart- dark ginger tom
(apprentice Dapplepaw)

Warriors

Sorrelleap- brown tabby shecat
(apprentice Flowerpaw)

Jaggedleaf- ragged looking black tomcat with green eyes

Sharpfire- dark ginger tomcat with long claws
(apprentice Harepaw)

Mothflame- tawny shecat with blue eyes

Leafdapple- brown tabby shecat with cream spots along her back.

Apprentices

Flowerpaw- delicate white shecat with ginger patches

Harepaw- large brown tom

Dapplepaw- small creamy brown tabby shecat with green eyes

Queens

Crowtail- light grey tabby shecat with green eyes. Mother of Seedkit, a black tom, and Rootkit, a grey tom.

Elders.

Eagleflight- brown tom

prologue

"Why are we leaving? This has been our home for generations!" The small grey shecat hissed as she stood shakily from her position by the entrance to the rocky camp. "We all know it. Our ancestors wanted us to stay here with the clans, to fix the rift in Starclan and to protect us all. We can't leave when this is our home!"

"I'm sorry Dewtail, Skyclan can no longer stay with the other clans. We can't support ourself on this." A large brown tom spoke softly, his voice soothing.

"Harewhisker is right. We thought when Leafstar and Hawkwing helped bring us to the lake we would be safe. But the other clans test our borders and steal our prey. We grow weak as they work to destroy us. From now on and forever, Skyclan will go back to our home. Back to our gorge. And we will never trust the clans again!" A large grey tabby tom called from his perch on a large rock, the rest of his clan cheering in agreement. He caught the furious glint in his medicine cat's eyes, and with a cold sneer he continued. "And any cat who disagrees are welcome to live out their days as a rogue, banished from Skyclan."

Dewtail shook her head as she retreated into a den, meeting the yellow eyes of a ginger tabby tom. "Well?" He spoke, his eyes hopeful as the little creamy brown tabby shecat beside him paused, her pale green eyes glancing up from the leaves she was sorting. It was only Dapplepaw's third day as an apprentice and already she was going to be uprooted from everything in order for the clan to find a new home.

"We won't be able to change Minnowstar's mind. We must hope to Starclan that someday the clans will accept us fully. I have seen the signs from Starclan. The lost clan will be saved by a storm of cinders and rain. Only then will four clans return to five and bring us full circle. My only hope is Skyclan stays alive to see it." Dewtail meowed gravely.

—

Ravensight curled up in his nest, his tail over his nose as he dreamt. He stood in a rocky gorge, in front of him was a creamy brown tabby shecat

with green eyes, along with a large brown tom. "Who are you? Where am I?"

The two cats shared a look, offering Ravensight the chance to study them. They looked similar, with the same green eyes and long legs. Their hind legs were muscular, made for leaping, and as the tom lifted a massive paw to brush his nose slightly, Ravensight could see dark grey pads made for traveling stones.

"I am Dappleheart, this is Harestar. We're from Skyclan and we have a message. The storm of cinders and rain will bring the fifth clan full circle and defeat the coming darkness. But beware, where one falls, all fail." Dappleheart spoke softly. As the brown shecat spoke, her companion glared at Ravensight as his claws unsheathed quickly and he lashed out, his paw swiping towards Ravensight's eyes.

With a jolt Ravensight woke up, his tail bristling as he looked around worriedly, his pale eyes wide as the echos of the apparent Skyclan cat's words.

'The storm of cinders and rain will bring the fifth clan full circle and defeat the coming darkness. But beware, where one falls, all fail.'

---

chapter one

Cinderkit could hardly contain her excitement as she waited anxiously by the entrance to the nursery.

She had gotten up earlier than her littermates and mother, all in hopes that she would be the first to see Thistlefang come in from the dawn patrol. Cinderkit was excited, the thought of seeing her father making her small silver pelted body wiggle from happiness. She could barely feel the early morning chill that came along with leaf-fall, her thick pelt coming in handy.

Cinderkit was the more outgoing of the warriors' three kits. She was the smallest of her litter, with the same silver tabby pelt as Skyfeather but with copper eyes much like her father's. More than just his eye color, Cinderkit shared Thistlefang's short tempered nature. Although, where the golden pelted warrior seemed to have matured and learned how to control it better, his more rebellious daughter seemed to constantly be in trouble.

Cinderkit's siblings, Rainkit and Stormkit, were less outspoken than she was. Out of all three of the kits, Stormkit resembled their father the most, with thick golden brown tabby fur and a large frame. The only tom-kit even had his father's eyes. Rainkit seemed to be the only one of the three who didn't physically resemble their father in any form. She had sleek blue-grey fur and blue eyes, her frame tall and lanky. It was thanks to her long legs that she attributed her clumsiness, often being the one to stumble over her own paws.

"Thistlefang!" Cinderkit chirped as she left the nursery entrance to greet her father as he entered the camp, Wrenflight, Falconstrike and Mistyrain following.

Cinderkit liked the former Riverclan shecat well enough, especially since they were kin, and she hoped that the dark grey shecat would be her mentor; admiring the shecat's humor and easygoing nature.

Mistyrain and Falconstrike shared a warm look as they padded past

the silver shekit towards the freshkill pile, the grey warrior leading her mate. Cinderkit could hardly remember when the two weren't together, only that Lionclaw, one of the elders and her grandfather, had mentioned that Mistyrain had originally joined ThunderClan after the great battle with Duskheart. According to him and Cinderkit's grandmother Willowstep, Mistyrain had fallen in love with Falconstrike as an apprentice, and had wanted nothing more than to be in the same clan with him. Despite the shecat being apart of ThhnderClan for many moons, she still received suspicious looks from many of the other warriors.

Thistlefang purred as he looked down at his kit, his whiskers twitching. "Shouldn't you be asleep with your mother?" He rumbled softly as he leaned down to lick between her ears affectionately. She batted at his nose playfully as she shook her head, her nose wrinkled.

"No. Rainkit and Stormkit sleep all the time and I'm bored. Will you show me how to hunt?" She spoke, her tail flicking. Thistlefang grinned, his eyes soft as he listened to his daughter speak, his own mouth opening before he was interrupted.

"I could have Tigerpaw show you some moves?" Falconstrike offered as he looked up from the rabbit he and Mistyrain were sharing, his ear flicking. Cinderkit felt a tinge of cautiousness as the black furred warrior spoke up. Falconstrike seemed nice enough, but he was one of the more stoic warriors. She could hardly remember a time when the dark pelted warrior smiled away from his mate.

"Oh can he? Please Thistlefang?" Cunderkit begged, her eyes stretched wide as she looked up at her father hopefully.

"I don't see why not. My little warrior should start training early." He purred warmly as he watched her jump up and down.

Falconstrike nodded as he sat up a bit, his tail flicking as he gestured for his apprentice to come over. The black tabby apprentice had just emerged from the apprentice den, his dark fur fluffed up against the early morning chill.

Tigerpaw made his way from the apprentice den, his tabby pelt fluffed up against the early morning chill. "Cmon Cinderkit, let's go over here." He spoke as he beckoned her with his tail. He was one of the older apprentices, and Specklednose and Oakpelt's only surviving kit. His littermates Rabbitkit and Mothkit had died from the same bout of greencough that had taken one of Mudstar's lives and many of the clans older warriors and elders. He often spent his time with Bramblepaw and his sister Honeypaw, the trio less friendly than Tawnypaw, Featherpaw and Blossompaw.

"Okay!" Cinderkit purred as she made her way after the apprentice, her tail sticking straight up in the air as she followed him happily. Tigerpaw let out a chuckle as he waited for the little grey shecat by the apprentice den, his dark blue eyes gleaming. As she approached, he settled into a crouch, his tail flicking as he motioned for her to copy him.

"Lower, until your belly fur brushes the ground." He instructed. "And your tail needs to be a bit higher; you don't want to alert the prey where you are but you'll need to keep it high enough to avoid touching leaves." as he explained he used his tail to correct her posture, her head nodding in concentration.

"See that bit of twig? Aim for that. Stalk it. Keep your paw steps light and when you think you're close enough, pounce." Tigerpaw meowed, his whiskers twitching as he watched the grey she-kit move, his head tilting.

Cinderkit kept her eyes focused on the twig as she crept closer, her muscles tending. When she was almost a mouse-length away she pounced, landing on top of the twig easily. "I did it! Did you see me Tigerpaw?" She purred, her eyes bright as she turned to look at him.

"Good job! You're gonna be a good hunter." He meowed as he purred, his dark blue eyes gleaming. She purred back as she looked up at him, her tail flicking. She opened her mouth to respond, pausing as she herd her mother call for her, her ears pricked as she turned her head to see Skyfeather's face peeking out from the nursery, her eyes focusing on her kit.

"I'll see you around Tigerpaw!" She called out as she hurried

towards the nursery, entering it as she spoke.

"Next time you decide to rise with the sun little warrior, let me know." Skyfeather purred as she nuzzled her daughter gently. "Did you see your father?"

"Yes, and Tigerpaw showed me how to do a hunting crouch." Cinderkit meowed proudly.

"Bramblepaw showed us how to stalk a mouse." Rainkit meowed softly as she looked up from where she sat grooming herself, her blue-grey fur soft. Cinderkit could see Stormkit's golden tabby body curled up beside their sister, his flank rising and falling slowly as he slept.

'Stormkit could sleep through a herd of foxes!' With a snort, she turned her eyes back towards her mother, her head tilting.

"Soon you will be apprentices and your mentors will teach you those things and more." Skyfeather meowed, her tail curling around herself as she looked at her three kits lovingly.

"I want Mistyrain as my mentor. She's one of the coolest warriors in the clan." Cinderkit meowed. She let out a huff as Rainkit brushed by her, going to curl up against Skyfeather's side. Cinderkit followed, sitting in front of her mother.

"We'll see. It depends on who Mudstar thinks is a good fit for you." Skyfeather meowed softly, her whiskers twitching. "My first apprentice was Oakfur, and he mentored Smokefang."

"Who did Thistlefang mentor?" Rainkit meowed as she rose to her paws and stretched, her body quivering as she finished. With a slight yawn, the blue-grey she-kit moved, sitting down next to Cinderkit. Cinderkit pressed against her taller sister's blue tinged pelt, enjoying the warmth and comfort it provided.

"Falconstrike." Skyfeather meowed with a purr. "He was so surprised when Snakestar made him his mentor, he had no idea. A lot of the clan believed Thistlefang would be arrogant and harsh, and he proved them wrong. He helped develop Falconstrike into a fierce

and formidable warrior."

"I'm gonna be the strongest warrior in the forest, in all the clans." Cinderkit exclaimed, her eyes gleaming as her short tail lashed. Rainkit nodded encouragingly as she purred, her light blue eyes gentle.

With a snort, Stormkit opened one gleaming copper eye, his whiskers twitching as he spoke. "Well oh mighty warrior, can you keep it down? Some of us are trying to sleep!"

With a short, Cinderkit rolled her eyes as Stormkit fell asleep again. She could see Briarleap's mottled pelt curled up in her nest, her kits sleeping soundly. Closer to the back of the nursery Sagefern slept soundly; her kits' and her's grey and black striped pelts blended in against the shadowy den.

Stretching her head more, Cinderkit could just barely see Cherrythorn's flame colored pelt rising and falling as the queen slept.

Cinderkit huffed quietly, her tail flicking in annoyance as she waited for a sign that any of her friends would wake up, when Breezekit, one of Briarleap and Spiderclaw's kits, sat up. His dark blue eyes blinked a few times to adjust to the den's dim lighting, peering around quietly as he sat up in his nest. "Cinderkit? Why are you awake?"

"I wanted to see Thistlefang." She shrugged. "He told us that he would be on the Dawn patrol and I wanted to see him come in. And Tigerpaw showed me how to hunt!" Glancing over her shoulder, she could see Skyfeather falling asleep again, Stormkit curled into her side along with Rainkit.

Breezekit made a face, his dark eyes narrowed. "Tigerpaw is so arrogant and rude. He told Petalkit and Hazelkit that they're small enough for a squirrel to eat." Ashkit was very protective over his den-mates, especially the younger kits like Hazelkit and Petalkit. Petalkit had always been sickly, and often was teased by the others because of it. More often she was seen trailing behind Hazelkit. Sagefern's kits, Hawkkit and Lionkit, were often the ones teasing the

two she-kits.

"He's nice. If anything Bramblepaw is the rude one. Hes as prickly as a old badger." Cinderkit meowed, her whiskers twitching at the mention of the spiky furred tom.

Breezekit chuckled and nodded, his tail waving as he made his way closer to the silver shecat. Once he was at her side he sat down, his tail curled over his paws. "Remember when he helped Tawnypaw clean out the nursery and Rainkit accidentally ran into him? She was so embarrassed."

"That's cause Rainkit likes him. She thinks he's charming." Cinderkit meowed, her head shaking. "He seems less prickly with her, so I guess that's good."

Cinderkit often felt the need to defend her soft spoken sister, hating to see anyone mistreat the gentle she-kit. Stormkit was the same way, always keeping an eye out for his two sisters.

"Careful, if Rainkit heard you say that she'd be rather cross." Breezekit meowed as he began to groom hisself, his sleek dark grey pelt rippling as he moved. He and his sisters had a few moons left until they become apprentices, and Cinderkit was excited at the prospect of being able to train with her friends.

"Oh she won't. She's never upset." Cinderkit meowed dismissively. It was true, Rainkit was never upset. She was always pleasant and easy to be around. Which was probably why Bramblepaw never seemed to be rude with her. The spiky furred tom seemed to always be arguing with someone, his personality as prickly as his pelt. But when Rainkit asked him a question he softened, his voice quiet and gentle as if he was afraid to upset the lanky blue-grey shecat. Cinderkit often caught the spiky furred apprentice watching Rainkit with an almost possessive gleam to his green gaze.

Breezekit shook his head as he finished grooming his pelt. He had grown a lot, his smokey pelt was sleek and thick, his legs long. "Are you gonna watch Featherpaw, Blossompaw and Tawnypaw's warrior ceremony?" He questioned, his head tilting.

"Of course. They were our friends remember?"
Cinderkit meowed, nudging his shoulder playfully. "Think I would miss it?"

-

Sun-high came and with it the announcement of a clan meeting. Cinderkit barreled out of the nursery, her eyes wide with excitement as she went to pick a seat, trailed closely by Breezekit, Hawkkit and Stormkit, while Rainkit, Petalkit, Lionkit, and Hazelkit followed a bit behind. The eight kits soon settled near the front as they awaited the ceremony. With a quick glance over her shoulder, Cinderkit watched as Skyfeather, Briarleap and Sagefern positioned themselves where they could keep an eye on their children. As she continued to look, she caught Spiderclaw making his way to Briarleap's side, nudging her cheek affectionately as he sat down.

She turned back around, her eyes moving to look for Tawnypaw and her sisters. She sat up a bit more as she caught sight of the three shecats sitting with their mother, Wrenflight, and their father, Shrewtail. All three apprentices' pelts were groomed neatly, although Blossompaw had a patch of fur on her chest that seemed to be laying in every direction besides the way it was supposed to.

A yowl caught her attention, her golden eyes moving to watch as Mudstar perched on the tall rock, his green eyes gleaming proudly as he looked down at the clan.

"Today we gather to make three kits apprentices into warriors." He announced, pausing to let the clan finish chattering their excitement.
As the clan began to quiet down, Cinderkit's eyes met with the dark blue gaze of Tigerpaw. The dark furred apprentice sent her a wink, his blue eyes gleaming mischievously as he turned his gaze back to Mudstar.

Mudstar raised his tail for attention as the clan stopped talking, his eyes gleaming proudly.

"Lightningtail, Specklednose, what are your evaluations?" He

addressed, his ear flicking as Tawnypaw, Featherpaw and Blossompaw stepped forward.

"Blossompaw is an exceptional tracker. During her team hunting she was a bit hesitant to take charge, but once she got used to it she did fine. She's more than ready to become a warrior." Specklednose declared, her spotted tail flicking proudly as she looked at her apprentice.

"Featherpaw started off as a quiet and shy apprentice, and is now one of the most dedicated and strong willed she-cats I've met. She is a fine hunter and has a good sense for fighting. She is ready." Lightningtail spoke next, his black fur groomed neatly.

"I assessed Tawnypaw to be a proficient hunter, and an exceptional fighter. She's ready." Mudstar announced.

"Blossompaw, Tawnypaw and Featherpaw. Do you promise to uphold the warrior code and defend your clan, even at the cost of your life?" Mudstar addressed the three shecats directly, his eyes gleaming.

"I do." Tawnypaw spoke first, her deep orange eyes full of fire.

"I do." Blossompaw promised, her chin lifted proudly.

"I do." Featherpaw meowed, her soft voice full of determination.

"Then by the powers of StarClan, I name you warriors and hail you by your new names." He meowed, stepping closer as he looked at them.

"Tawnypaw, from this day forward, you will be known as Tawnyfoot. ThunderClan honors your quick thinking and ferocity. " he placed his muzzle on her head as the tabby warrior licked his shoulder respectfully.

"Featherpaw, from this day on, you will be known as Featherheart. We thank you for your kind nature and loyalty." He spoke, nodding at the cream colored shecat approvingly as she stepped forward.

"Blossompaw, from this day until your last, you will be known as

Blossomtail." He spoke, his eyes gleaming proudly as the clan cheered for the three new warriors happily.

"Just think, one more moon and that'll be us!" Cinderkit nudged her brother, Stormkit purring in response.

'Yes', Cinderkit thought, her chin lifting as she listened to the clan celebrate. '*One more moon.'*

chapter two

"*Cinderkit stay still!"*

Rainkit stifled a laugh, her eyes shifting from the nursery entrance to where her mother was trying unsuccessfully to groom a wiggling Cinderkit.

"I can't! It's almost time to become apprentices. Do you think I'll get a mentor like Tawnyfoot or Mistyrain? Or even Dustyleaf? Imagine being trained by the clan deputy!" Cinderkit chattered, her copper eyes bright as she stared off dreamily.

Stormkit snorted, his eyes rolling as he stretched. In the past moon he had grown, his tawny pelt darkening to resemble their fathers. "I think Mudstar may assign you as Lightningtail's apprentice." He teased, his whiskers twitching.

"He can't, we're kin. Remember bee-brain?" Cinderkit retorted, her nose sticking in the air.

Stormkit snorted, his whiskers twitching as he turned his head to look out of the nursery again.

"Hey, you three almost ready?" Thistlefang rumbled, ducking his head to enter the den. He shared a warm look with Skyfeather, the two warriors look ready to burst with pride. "The meeting will start soon."

"Almost.." Skyfeather meowed, finishing up with Cinderkit. "Done. Alright, remember to take your time and be presentable."

Rainkit nodded, following Stormkit and Cinderkit closely as the family exited the nursery.

Blinking a few times as her eyes adjusted to the sun filled camp, she felt a rush of nerves and excitement at the sight of the clan gathered. Over by the apprentice den, Bramblepaw, Tigerpaw and

Honeypaw sat watching. Tigerpaw looked pleased, his dark blue eyes staring at Cinderkit as he nodded along to whatever Honeypaw was saying, the pretty brown tabby shecat looking annoyed as she noticed what her companion was looking at.

Bramblepaw met her eyes directly, his light green eyes looking into her blue ones intensely. With a slight smile, he nodded once at her, his features softening. Peeking up, Rainkit felt her confidence raise a little as she turned, sitting beside her siblings proudly.

"Today we make three new apprentices. Rainkit, Stormkit and Cinderkit have reached their sixth moon, and are now able to become apprentices. Cinderkit, step forward." Mudstar spoke, his eyes gleaming as he looked at his nephew and nieces.

Cinderkit moved forward, her golden eyes staring forward proudly.

"Cinderkit, from this day until you earn your warrior name you will be known as Cinderpaw. Mistyrain," Mudstar spoke, his eyes turning to look at the pretty grey shecat. "You are a dedicated and honorable warrior. I hope you can pass on these qualities and more to Cinderpaw."

The silver tabby apprentice looked positively overjoyed as she moved to touch noses with her mentor, her tail flicking happily.

"Stormkit, from this day until you become a warrior you will be known as Stormpaw. Pinefur, as a fairly new warrior it is my hope that you will show your apprentice the ways of a warrior, and cultivate the humor and strength I see in this young apprentice." Mudstar meowed, his eyes gleaming at the sight of his son and the new apprentice meeting. As the pair moved away, his eyes turned to Rainkit.

She felt a small shiver run down her spine, her pelt prickling anxiously as she waited, aware of each of her clanmates' eyes on her.

"Rainkit, from this moment until you earn your warrior name, you will be known as Rainpaw. Owlflame," Mudstar meowed, his eyes soft as he spoke to the lanky shecat. At his words, a long legged

dappled brown tom stepped forward, his copper eyes narrowed as he approached his new apprentice. "Owlflame, you are a fierce and ambitious warrior. I hope your ambition and ferocity will pass along to this young apprentice and make her a capable and sure-footed warrior."

Owlflame was Pinefur's brother. The two warriors were as different as night and day; where Pinefur was a jokester and was often seen laughing, his littermate was often seen fighting or arguing, his dark amber eyes fierce.

Owlflame nodded as he touched noses with Rainpaw, his eyes softening. "I promise I will do everything to make you one of the best warriors in the clan." He promised.

She nodded slowly as she looked up at him, aware of the clan cheering. Rainkit turned her head, catching sight of her siblings being congratulated warmly.

Stormpaw was speaking animatedly with Ashpaw and his brothers, the four toms laughing as they spoke. Cinderpaw sat a few tail-lengths away, her yellow eyes gleaming as she responded to Tigerpaw, her head tilted coyly.

"I told you that Mudstar would find you a suitable mentor. Owlflame is a fierce warrior, but he's also kind." Bramblepaw meowed from behind her, causing the blueish grey shecat to turn quickly. "Congrats Rain*paw*."

"Thank you Bramblepaw. Soon you'll be getting your warrior name, Honeypaw and Tigerpaw too." She meowed, her voice soft as she looked up at him. Even with her long legs and lanky frame, Bramblepaw was larger than her, his spiky furred pelt gleaming healthily.

"You better be in the front of the clan to cheer me on." His deep voice was teasing, his leaf colored eyes shining as he flicked her ear playfully.

"Only if you do the same for me." Rainpaw laughed, her shoulders relaxing. She felt light, her fur laying smooth.

"Rainpaw! Come on, Owlflame wants to see you..." Stormpaw meowed as he walked over, trailing off at the sight of Bramblepaw beside his sister. "Bramblepaw."

"Stormpaw. Congratulations." Bramblepaw replied, his voice curt. He looked back at Rainpaw with a soft smile, his tone softening. "I'll catch you later."

"See you." Rainpaw meowed, her eyes gazing after the brown tabby tom as he made his way to his sister's side, Honeypaw glaring openly at Cinderpaw and Tigerpaw as the two continued to laugh.

"You coming?" Stormpaw meowed, his head tilting as he looked at his sister. She nodded, turning to follow him as he approached their mentors, the two warriors conversing as they sat.

"Rainpaw, you're gonna come with me to collect some fresh moss." Owlflame meowed as he looked at his apprentice.

"Okay." Rainpaw nodded, feeling a bit better now that she knew she wouldn't be in the position to make a fool of herself her first day. Unlike her siblings, learning how to crouch or fight never came easy to her. Cinderkit seemed to be able to pick up the basic moves Thistlefang and the older kits had shown them in the nursery with no problem, her copper eyes full of light and excitement.

Even Stormpaw seemed to be able to pick up some things before the three left the nursery. The golden pelted apprentice had already perfected his hunting crouch by their fifth moon, and had spent as much time as possible helping Rainpaw.

"You and I are going to join Wrenflight, Foxfang and Sparkpaw on a border patrol to the ShadowClan border." Pinefur meowed as he looked at his apprentice, Stormpaw nodding.

"I'll see you later, okay?" Stormpaw promised his sister, giving her a gentle nudge as he followed his mentor towards a patrol by the camp entrance.

"Come on, moss collecting isn't too bad. My mentor, Meadowheart, once told me that it gives us more control over our movements. You

want to
Be precise enough to get a clean piece of moss, without ripping it up. Those skills will translate to battle, when you need to trust your body to defend you." Owlflame explained, his features softening. "I know it can seem hard and impossible, but you will be a wonderful warrior. I promise."

Rainpaw nodded, her body straightening. "I'll do my best to be a good apprentice."

"I have no doubt you'll be a wonderful one. Besides, you do have the best warrior as your mentor." Owlflame teased, smiling as Rainpaw laughed. "Now come on, let's get to collecting!"

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It took them most of the day to collect enough moss to stock up the medicine cat den, and despite Rainpaw's hesitation, she proved to be quick and efficient. By the end, she felt as if her claws were going to fall off, eager to return to camp with the bundles of moss gathered.

"Go on and make yourself a nest. Tomorrow we can go practice hunting with Pinefur and Stormpaw." Owlflame spoke, his tail touching her shoulder gently as he set his moss bundle down. "You did well today."

"Thank you." She meowed, her paws aching to get to the apprentice den as she turned and headed in the direction of the bramble den.

Once inside, she made her way towards the back corner, setting her moss bundle down as she began to shape it into a nest. Absentmindedly, her paws worked to shape some of the leftover pieces into two other nests.

"Making nests for Cinderpaw and Stormpaw?" Bramblepaw's low voice spoke from behind her, causing the slate colored she-cat to turn her head quickly, her azure eyes focusing on the brown tabby apprentice. He looked amused, his light green eyes sparking as he stepped further inside the rather spacious den. Despite how tall Rainpaw was, Bramblepaw never failed to make her feel small, his

spiky furred frame was large and muscular, his shoulders broad and his legs long.

"Uh, yeah. I figured they would be tired when they got back, and I already had enough moss left over from collecting it with Owlflame." She spoke, her ears pinned to her head. "Would you like some for your nest?"

Bramblepaw watched her thoughtfully, his head tilting as he walked closer. Brushing past, he settled into a mossy nest next to the one she had prepared for herself, his tail beckoning her closer.

She crept forward carefully, sitting in her nest as she looked at him.

"My nest is here since it's the warmest in leaf-bare, and the coolest in green-leaf. Honeypaw picked the center of the den, Tigerpaw is over by the other side." He explained, gesturing to each nest in turn. "Which, Honeypaw has always liked the center spaces for her nest."

"Stormpaw is like that a bit. When we were all still in the nursery, he was always in between me and Cinderpaw. That's why I placed his nest there." Rainpaw explained, relaxing as she spoke. "Cinderpaw prefers being closest to the entrance. She claims to like being able to look out and see, but I think it's because she feels like she has to be between Stormpaw and I and whatever could come through it."

"Cinderpaw and Stormpaw both seem to be protective of you. It's not a bad thing. Honeypaw is like that with me, and I with her." Bramblepaw mewed, his ears flicking.

"They are. It's because of how different we are. Cinderpaw has always been the outgoing and loud one, the fighter. And Stormpaw is so thoughtful and quiet, I know he'll make a fantastic warrior." Rainpaw meowed, her heart warming at the thought of her siblings.

"And you?" Bramblepaw prodded, his eyes shining. "What about your qualities?"

"I'm just a normal cat. I'll be an okay warrior, I think." Rainpaw admitted. "I worry sometimes that I'll never be as brave as

Cinderpaw, as quick as Stormpaw. I worry that I'll disappoint Thistlefang and Skyfeather, that I won't be a good enough warrior."

"Rainpaw, you will be a fantastic warrior. Being a warrior isn't always about how brave or quick you are. It's the ability to do what's right, to stand up for those who can't. It's being kind to everyone. And I happen to know that you will become one of the greatest warriors in ThunderClan." Bramblepaw declared, his chin lifting.

She let out a soft laugh, her head shaking. "And what if I'm not?"

"Impossible. With Owlflame mentoring you, you'll be great. And if you happen to need extra help, I'm always here. I don't mind to give you a few pointers if you need them." Bramblepaw offered with a grin.

Rainpaw opened her mouth to respond, her spirits lifted. Before she could, Cinderpaw pushed in, followed closely by a snickering Tigerpaw.

"Oh shut up, mouse-brain." Cinderpaw huffed as she rolled her copper eyes at the laughing apprentice, Tigerpaw only snickering louder.

"What happened?" Rainpaw meowed, her head tilted. She felt a rush of adrenaline as Bramblepaw moved to stand beside her, his pelt brushing against hers slightly.

"Cinderpaw here was so eager to help patrol the ShadowClan border that she happened to run face-first into a holly bush." Tigerpaw laughed, ducking as Cinderpaw swiped at him.

"Stop, it wasn't even that funny." Cinderpaw protested.

"It kinda was." He grinned, his whiskers twitching.

"Whatever. I'm going to bed." She huffed, her eyes narrowing. "I better get some moss for a nest."

"I made you one. It's the closest to the entrance." Rainpaw interjected, purring lightly as Cinderpaw shot her a grateful look.

"Thanks." The silver tabby apprentice muttered as she curled up, her mouth opening in a yawn.

Rainpaw purred in response before settling into her own nest. She dozed for a while, aware of Honeypaw and Stormpaw entering the den sometime after. She felt something warm pressing against her side, and with a glance she was rewarded with the sight of Bramblepaw, his nest moved closer to hers.

The light brown tom was curled up asleep, his side pressed against hers as he snored softly. Upon a quick survey of the den, Rainpaw could see Cinderpaw and Stormpaw sleeping, Honeypaw sprawled out in her nest, and Tigerpaw curled up in a dark mass of fur on the other side of the den.

She let out a soft sigh, closing her eyes as she drifted to sleep.

chapter three

"The first thing to remember when hunting mice is to keep your paw steps as quiet and soft as possible." Owlflame spoke, his speckled tail lashing.

Owlflame, Pinefur and their apprentices had left camp after the dawn patrol, deciding to stop in a clearing not too far from the training hollow in order for the two apprentices to learn how to hunt properly.

Stormpaw nodded quietly, his dark eyes focused on the two warriors. He had been woken by Pinefur, with the instructions that he and Rainpaw were to be waiting at the camp entrance for their mentors by the time the dawn patrol had left camp. Upon turning to wake his sister, Stormpaw was met with the sight of Bramblepaw's nest right next to Rainpaw's. As he watched, Bramblepaw woke up slowly, his pale green eyes staring first at Rainpaw before turning to look around the den. As their eyes met. the spiky furred tom lazily stood up and stretched, eyeing him cooly before leaving the den slowly, his chin lifted arrogantly.

Stormpaw had always seen the way Bramblepaw had watched Rainpaw, even when she was a kit. It reminded him in a way, of how Thistlefang would sometimes look at his mother; a look of devotion and love. But Bramblepaw's looks seemed darker, more possessive and serious.

He didn't trust the older apprentice, not when it came to Rainpaw. He knew that it was illogical to be so protective, especially when Rainpaw could be able to defend herself. But Rainpaw wouldn't. She wouldn't even fight back in fear of hurting someone. At times during their kit-hood, Stormpaw had wondered if she would follow the path of a medicine cat instead of a warrior, given her soft nature.

"Show us your hunting crouches." Pinefur instructed, rising to his paws as he yawned. The dark tabby sat beside Owlflame, the two

toms looking similar in their builds and features. It surprised Stormpaw how the two were related; Pinefur was always happy and joking, his eyes bright with humor. Owlflame seemed rough and fierce, his yellow eyes hard as stone.

Stormpaw sank into a crouch, relishing in the feeling of his muscles tensing and flexing under his pelt. He kept his tail down, it hovering over the earth as he waited for his mentor to inspect him.

Next to him, Rainpaw struggled to stay balanced, her hind legs a little too far apart and her front paws not supporting her weight evenly. With a slight prod in her side she stumbled, shooting Pinefur a indignant look as she steadied herself.

"Keep those legs balanced Rainpaw, you want to catch prey, not alert it." He joked, his eyes gleaming brightly.

"Rainpaw, maybe you should've become a medicine cat, I'm sure herbs would be easier for you to catch." Stormpaw teased, nudging her as he stood up. His purr died as he noticed the crestfallen look on her face, her light colored eyes looking saddened by his words.

"Rainpaw I didn't mean-" Stormpaw spoke, his pelt bristling as he realized how his words may have sounded, his copper eyes fixed on the slate colored apprentice worriedly as she seemed to wilt.

"How about you two go in, I'll stay and help Rainpaw practice?" Owlflame meowed, his voice soft as he looked at his apprentice. "That okay with you Rainpaw?"

"Sure." She meowed quietly, her shoulders hunched.

"Good. This will be like moss collecting, except you don't get to throw moss balls at me." He nudged her, causing her to let out a soft chuckle, her head lifting a little.

Pinefur nodded before flicking his tail, Stormpaw following.

"I saw your face when Rainpaw spoke. You didn't do anything wrong, you were teasing." Pinefur addressed softly, his tail flicking. He looked calm, his eyes warm. "She's sensitive, and that's no fault of hers or yours. You just need to be mindful of how your words can

be taken by others."

The advise was good, and Pinefur worded it well. But Stormpaw still felt a bit of guilt at the thought of upsetting his sister. "I know Rainpaw is sensitive, she always has been. But I didn't mean it like that. When we were in the nursery she was always so timid and shy. Cinderpaw and I always assumed she would end up as a medicine cat apprentice."

"Owlflame and I were very much opposites when we were kits. He was loud, fierce, reckless and rough, and I was more quiet. I tended to stick back and wait things out, cover issues with humor as a way to soothe others. When we became apprentices, Owlflame was apprenticed to Lightningtail, who you know is a very calm and laidback warrior. I was apprenticed to Spiderclaw, who helped my confidence. That's why Owlflame is a good match for Rainpaw, he sees how timid she is and how soft spoken, and he knows how far to push before letting up. He'll help her grow tougher." Pinefur spoke gently, his features serene as he spoke of his past.

"If that's why Mudstar picked Owlflame to mentor Rainpaw, why did he give me you, and Cinderpaw got Mistyrain?" Stormpaw questioned, his coppery eyes full of curiosity.

"I think Mudstar assigned me as your mentor because of how quiet and standoffish you were as a kit. You played, but you held back a lot. I used to watch you and your littermates play, and you always seemed to be keeping an eye out for them while joining in. And I'm known for being silly and good-humored, so I sssume he hoped I'd be able to help you loosen up and relax more." Pinefur answered honestly, flicking her dark tail across Stormpaw's tawny ears playfully. The smaller tomcat let out a hiss playfully, his eyes gleaming as he ducked slightly.

"And Mistyrain is as relaxed and even-tempered as they get, even more so than Lightmingtail. It would take the whole of StarClan to be able to keep up with Cinderpaw." Pinefur grinned, his head shaking in amusement at the mention of the silver furred apprentice.

"Yeah, she's always been spirited." Stormpaw purred as he thought

of his other sibling. Cinderpaw was definitely the more outgoing, always eager and jumping into action. Stormpaw loved her; loved how fierce and stubborn she could be. Where Cinderpaw was fierce and loud, Rainpaw was the opposite.

"Shall we get to hunting? I heard a rumor that some of your den mates may be getting their warrior ceremony today." Pinefur meowed, his tail flicking lightly as Stormpaw perked up.

"Let's do it."

-

Stormpaw followed his mentor into camp proudly, a thrush held firmly in his jaws. He felt a rush of excitement and pride as some of the clan members murmured their approval at the sight of his catch.

As he set the piece of prey down, Cinderpaw and Rainpaw approached. Both she cats looked proud, Rainpaw beaming while Cinderpaw smirked.

"Nice catch Stormpaw." Rainpaw meowed proudly, her eyes bright as she looked at him. The blue tinted apprentice looked happier, her soft azure eyes looking at him.

"Bet I catch a rabbit." Cinderpaw meowed, her tone teasing as she nudged his shoulder, causing Rainpaw to laugh and roll her eyes at their sister's boast.

"Maybe. If you even get to leave camp." Stormpaw shot back, his chin lifted arrogantly as Cinderpaw playfully swiped at his ears, the two laughing as Rainpaw watched.

"May all cats old enough to catch their own prey gather for a clan meeting!" Mudstar announced as he leapt on top of the high-rock, his deputy Dustylead at his side.

Looking around, Stormpaw caught sight of his mother sitting beside her littermate Nightmist, the two she-cats meowing softly to each other as they waited. Thistlefang soon made his way towards his mate and her sister, dipping his head respectfully as he sat down beside Skyfeather; his golden tail wrapping around her

affectionately.

"Scoot over." Cinderpaw murmured as she nudged Stormpaw over, the three apprentices sitting down where they had stood, having a clear view of the meeting.

"As many of you know, today we celebrate the making of new warriors. Bramblepaw, Tigerpaw, and Honeypaw have all had their warrior assessments and have been judged not only by their mentors' standards, but as a unit. Sparrowstrike, Falconstrike, Nightmist, how did they do?" Mudstar spoke, his light colored eyes fixing their gaze on the three warriors in turn.

"Bramblepaw is a fierce and dedicated apprentice. He took charge during his team hunting with Duskpetal, and he brought back a substantial amount of prey. He is ready to become a warrior." Sparrowstrike called out, his eyes focused on the spiky furred apprentice as Bramblepaw stepped forward slightly. Bramblepaw dipped his head respectfully to his mentor before fixing his light green eyes on
Mudstar.

Stormpaw felt a shudder run down his spine at the sight of the older apprentice staring so intensely at their leader. Bramblepaw looked confident and smug, his chin lifted arrogantly.

"Falconstrike? How was Tigerpaw?" Mudstar addressed the black furred warrior next, Falconstrike stepping forward as he gestured towards Tigerpaw.

"Tigerpaw is strong, honorable and kind. He was hesitant to take charge when paired with Tawnyfoot, but he instead asked her opinion and used it to make a decision. I believe he will make a wonderful warrior for ThunderClan." Falconstrike praised, his copper eyes turning from Mudstar to look directly at Tigerpaw. "You have been an incredible apprentice, and I'm glad I had the opportunity to mentor you."

Tigerpaw looked excited, his dark pelted tail lashing as he blinked warmly at his former mentor. Beside Stormpaw, Cinderpaw purred as she watched, her eyes trained on the black tabby apprentice.

"Nightmist, how was Honeypaw's assessment?" Mudstar questioned, his eyes softening as he addressed his mate.

"Honeypaw is a quick thinker, full of optimism and swift. She was efficient during her hunting, easily strategizing a quick and successful way of catching prey that utilized both her and Stonefang's skills. She is beyond prepared." Nightmist called, her green-blue eyes full of pride as she looked at her former apprentice from across the clearing.

"Then I call upon our ancestors to look down on these apprentices. They have trained hard in your code and I commend them as warriors in their turn. Bramblepaw," Mudstar called, his muscles bunching up as he leapt down, approaching the tom.

"From this day till your last, you will be known as Bramblestorm in honor of your fierceness and dedication to this clan." The brown pelted leader laid his muzzle on top of the newly named warrior's head, allowing Bramblestorm to lick his shoulder respectfully before he stepped back.

"Tigerpaw, you started your apprenticeship as a kit who was lively and reckless, and I am glad to see you grow into a mature and fine warrior. From this day till you join our ancestors, you will be known as Tigerfrost." Mudstar announced proudly, stepping forward to lay his muzzle on top of Tigerfrost's head.

"And Honeypaw. From this day until your last, you will be known as Honeypool." The pretty brown tabby she-cat looked nervous but excited as she licked Mudstar's shoulder, stepping back as the clan began to cheer for them loudly.

"Honeypool! Bramblestorm! Tigerfrost!" Stormpaw called, his ear twitching as Rainpaw and Cinderpaw joined in on either side of him. He watched as the three new warriors were soon surrounded by their family. He could see Bramblestorm and Honeypool being nuzzled by their parents, Daisytuft and Oakfur. The two warriors looked beyond proud as Daisytuft fussed over Bramblestorm, Honeypool purring as Oakfur nuzzled her cheek.

A few tail-lengths away, Tigerfrost stood proudly as his father

Smokefang congratulated him, his mother Specklednose pressing against his side happily.

"Let's go congratulate them." Cinderpaw decided, her tail whisking over Stormpaw's shoulder. Stormpaw nodded as he rose to his paws, following after his silver pelted sister as Rainpaw trailed behind. He rolled his eyes as Cinderpaw headed first for Honeypool and Bramblestorm, his dislike for the spiky furred tabby warrior not exactly hidden.

"Congrats Honeypool, Bramblestorm." Cinderpaw meowed, touching her nose with Honeypool's gently. She blinked warmly at Bramblestorm, the tom dipping his head politely.

"Thanks Cinderpaw. Soon it'll be you." Honeypool meowed, her tail flicking as she looked at the silver tabby apprentice.

Bramblestorm didn't say anything, his gaze fixed firmly on Rainpaw. Stormpaw's own copper eyes turned, watching as Rainpaw seemed to stand a little straighter as she stepped forward slightly. Bramblestorm seemed to soften, his voice low as he moved closer to the slate colored apprentice.

"Congratulations Bramblestorm. It'll be strange not having you in the apprentice den." She meowed softly, Stormpaw's ears straining to hear over the clan celebrating.

Bramblestorm purred softly, his tail tip twitching. "Honeypool, Tigerfrost and I will sleep in the apprentice den until they can expand the warriors den to accommodate us." He assured.

"Oh, well that's good." She responded, her whiskers twitching.

"I'm going to congratulate Tigerfrost." Stormpaw announced, his eyes sliding from his sister and the newly made warrior to glance at Cinderpaw, who perked up and nodded at the mention of the dark tabby tom.

"I'll come with. Rainpaw?" Cinderpaw meowed brightly, her head turning as she fixed her golden eyes on their sister.

Rainpaw shook her head slightly, her paws shuffling. "I'll be there in

a bit." She glanced up at Bramblestorm shyly, the tom grinning down at her.

"Alright. You wanna come Honeypool?" Cinderpaw offered, turning her attention onto the light brown tabby she-cat.

"Sure." Honeypool meowed, one of her ears flicking backwards. Stormpaw observed the older she-cat as she stood up and stretched. Honeypool was pretty, with light brown tabby fur, white paws and a lean frame. She certainly didn't share the spiky furred pelt Bramblestorm had, and her eyes were a pale green-gold, while his were more of a frosty green.

"Let's go. While Specklednose and Smokefang are distracted." Cinderpaw declared, leading her two companions as they headed towards the black tabby tom.

Tigerfrost's dark blue eyes flickered from the conversation his parents were having to look at the approaching cats, his eyes lighting up at the sight of Cinderpaw leading them closer.

"Hey, what's up?" Tigerfrost meowed, addressing the two apprentices and warrior.

"Just wanted to say congrats." Honeypool meowed, her eyes softening as she gazed at Tigerfrost longingly.

Cinderpaw grinned, her tail lashing as she looked at the tom. "Can't believe Mudstar made you a warrior. Figured a big fur ball like you wouldn't make it." She teased, her eyes gleaming brightly.

"Fur-ball huh?" Tigerfrost grinned, his chin lifting. "I'll have you know, Cinder*paw,* that I am now able to make you clean the elders' den for two sunrises if you don't respect my status." His voice was teasing as he looked at the silvery she-cat, his dark blue eyes happy.

Cinderpaw snorted, flicking his ear with her tail as she rolled her eyes. "Oh whatever."

Tigerfrost grinned triumphantly as his gaze turned to look at Stormpaw. "Hey, soon you'll be a warrior. I heard Pinefur bragging about you catching a thrush? That's awesome."

"Thanks, it was pretty cool." Stormpaw admitted. It was hard to not like Tigerfrost; the tom was funny, kind and had a good personality. "I heard you caught a hare your first day as an apprentice."

"Hares are tricky, I was lucky. I firmly think you could out-do me any day." Tigerfrost meowed, his voice confident.

Cinderpaw snorted, her head shaking. "Anyone could out-do you bee-brain." She teased, laughing as Tigerfrost lunged at her, the two beginning to play-fight as Honeypool and Stormpaw watched on.

Stormpaw purred in amusement as he watched Tigerfrost pin his sister down, the two laughing. His eyes gazed around the camp leisurely, pausing as he watched Ravensight stare at first Cinderpaw, then Rainpaw, before turning his pale grey-green gaze onto Stormpaw himself.

He shivered, his copper eyes staring directly at Ravensight as the medicine cat watching him intensely, before turning tail and disappearing into the medicine cat den.

chapter four

Cinderpaw blinked open her eyes, her copper gaze fixed on the shadowy trees and dark ground around her. Sitting up, her tail tip began to flick back and forth. She distinctly remembered going to sleep in the apprentice den, her pelt brushing against Tigerfrost.

She would miss the dark pelted warrior when he, Honeypool and Bramblestorm moved into the warriors' den across the camp. Although, from the way Honeypool seemed to get tense whenever Tigerfrost and Cinderpaw spoke, she was sure the brown tabby she-cat wouldn't mind having the large warrior to herself. Shaking her head to clear her thoughts, Cinderpaw rose to her paws and looked around.

"Hello?" She called, her pelt bristling slowly as she took a few hesitant steps forward. "Anyone there?"

"You must be Skyfeather and Thistlefang's daughter, Cinderpaw?" A low voice spoke from her left, causing the silver she-cat to turn quickly.

"That depends on who's asking." She spoke shortly, her claws unsheathed. Cinderpaw knew this had to be her dreams, that was the only explanation for her waking in this shadowy place.

A low chuckle sounded before a cat emerges from the brush in front of her. He was massive, with dusty brown fur, cool amber-green eyes, and a cocky smirk. Studying him, Cinderpaw found her eyes fixed on various scars, the most gruesome being a scar that went from one side of his throat to the other.

"I am just a ancestor now. But I've been watching you, Cinderpaw. You have potential, enough to become leader if you wanted." He purred, sitting down and beginning to groom himself.

"I do?" Cinderpaw spoke, her frame straightening as she looked at him. "What's your name?"

"You may have heard of me. My name is Duskheart." He meowed lazily,

watching in amusement as Cinderpaw shrank back quickly.

"You! You killed so many cats, your clan mates." She spoke, her eyes fixed on him. "Willowsyep and Lionclaw told me, Stormpaw and Rainpaw about it."

"And I've had time to repent. I only wish to see my clan have strong, capable warriors. Let me train you Cinderpaw. Let me make you the most powerful warrior I can, and let me gain forgiveness for what I've done." Duskheart meowed, his eyes soft and full of longing.

Cinderpaw hesitated. On one paw, Duskheart was supposed to be evil and ruthless, incapable of any form of grief or guilt. On the other, he seemed to be almost kind in the way he hoped to gain forgiveness. And from what Willowsyep and Lionclaw had said, Duskheart was once the best fighter in the clan. "What about Rainpaw and Stormpaw? They're both strong." She countered.

"I'm sure they are. But they aren't you, are they?" He purred as he looked at her. "Stormpaw is determined, yes, but his mind lies in hunting and being a good warrior. You could be great. And Rainpaw seems to be doing well enough. She is kind and loyal, but she lacks what you have. You are ambitious and brave, with the determination that could shake the forest to its roots if you willed it. I can see it in your eyes; you want to be greater than even Mudstar. You could do it, if you agree to let me help you." His words were honeyed and sweet, his eyes fixated on hers.

"Alright." She agreed, her chin lifting. "I'll train with you."

"Excellent. You better return to your world, it's time to wake." Duskheart purred. "And Cinderpaw?"

"Yes?" She meowed, her eyes watching him as he began to fade along with the shadowy trees and roots.

The last thing she could see was his glowing eyes as he spoke. "Don't tell anyone."

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Cinderpaw jolted awake as she felt a paw prod into her side, causing her to swipe at whoever it was. "I am awake."

"Finally. Get up lazy-bones, you're on a border patrol with Mistyrain." Tigerfrost purred as he looked at her, his whiskers twitching.

"Oh hush." She snorted as she sat up, quickly grooming her pelt. She felt a rush of excitement as her dream flooded back to her thoughts, and opening her mouth she began to tell Tigerfrost, stopping at the thought of Duskheart's request.

"I'll see you later Tigerfrost." She meowed, standing up and leaving the den. Upon entering the clearing, she blinked to adjust to the brighter light, her eyes re-focusing after a few heartbeats. She glanced around, catching sight of Stormpaw sharing a shrew with Honeypool, the light brown tabby she-cat looking happy as she spoke quietly. Stormpaw looked content, nodding along as his companion spoke.

Cinderpaw bit back a hiss at the sight of Bramblestorm carrying a rabbit to Rainpaw, her tail flicking at the sight of the brown tom speaking to her sister. Something about the new warrior put her on edge, and made her wary of any interactions he had with her more soft hearted sister.

"Cinderpaw, come on." Mistyrain called, standing at the camp entrance patiently. Beside her, Violetshine and Meadowheart waited. The two senior warriors looked bored, with Violetshine's tortoiseshell tail flicking lightly and Meadowheart's green gaze fixed firmly on the medicine cat den, where Snowfall's white and grey pelt would appear every so often.

"Coming!" Cinderpaw meowed as she hurried across the camp, her tail raised as she moved. Cinderpaw enjoyed being the former RiverClan cat's apprentice; loving how patient and easygoing Mistyrain was.

"We're patrolling the ShadowClan border, and then later we may meet up with Owlflame and Rainpaw for battle training." Mistyrain informed her, her tail touching Cknderpaw's shoulder gently before she turned to look at Meadowheart and Violetshine. "Let's go."

The patrol left camp, with Mistyrain and Meadowheart leading and

Violetshine walking beside Cinderpaw.

Violetshine was one of the warriors in camp Cinderpaw never really spoke to, always wary of the former barn-cat and not wanting to say the wrong thing and offend her.

"How's training so far?" Violetshine meowed, her dappled pelt sleek as she glanced at the silver apprentice. "Are you enjoying training with your siblings?"

"It's good. Mistyrain is a great mentor, and yes. Stormpaw is gonna be an amazing hunter, and Rainpaw tries." Cinderpaw meowed, her ears flicking back at the thought of her sister. Rainpaw had always been the clumsy one of the three, and usually was content to follow behind her siblings.

"I've seen Rainpaw track, she's rather good. And from Owlflame says, very stealthy. " Violetshine meowed. "You three remind me of my own kits."

"We do?" Cinderpaw meowed curiously, her head tilting as she continued to walk. "How?"

"You make me think of Briarleap. You both are headstrong and energetic. I can see a lot of potential in you. Stormpaw and Oakfur are a lot alike in that they're the only toms and therefore feel as if they have to protect their sisters. Stormpaw is colder, more calculating. It's not a bad thing, just means he's more likely to think before acting. Kestralfeather and Rainpaw are a lot alike, both quiet and thoughtful." Violetshine spoke, her voice wistful as she spoke of Kestralfeather.

"Willowstep told us about Kestralfeather. I'm sorry, that must be hard."

"She was a good warrior, and fought well. But sometimes foxes are simply faster. " Violetshine meowed. "She died defending her clan, and that's all she ever wanted."

"We're here. Meadowheart, Violetshine, can you mark the border?" Mistyrain meowed. "Cinderpaw, come here. I want you to take a

whiff and remember the scent of ShadowClan ."

Cinderpaw nodded as she moved forward. Taking a hesitant sniff, she was greeted with the strong smell of pine and marsh, with a slight bite to the scent. "Pines."

"That's because ShadowClan have a lot of pine trees in their territory, along with marshes and such. They have to be stealthy to avoid being heard." Mistyrain meowed.

"She's right." A cool voice spoke from across the border, moments before a dark grey tom appeared. With him, a black shecat with green eyes stood at his shoulder, two apprentices following. One of them was a pretty light ginger she-cat, her paws white as snow and her eyes a soft green. The other was a red tabby ton, his yellow eyes curious.

"Newtfang, how is ShadowClan? And Dawnstar?" Mistyrain meowed politely, her voice even.

"ShadowClan is fine, as is our leader. This is one of her kits and my apprentice, Petalpaw." Newtfang spoke, gesturing to the light ginger apprentice.

"And him?" Mistyrain nodded to the other apprentice as Meadowheart and Violetshine reappeared.

"This is my apprentice, Russetpaw." The black shecat meowed proudly.

"That's good, I'm happy for you Heatherleaf." Mistyrain meowed kindly, her eyes gentle. "This is my apprentice, Cinderpaw."

Cinderpaw perked up, her chin lifted proudly as she felt the ShadowClan cats turn their gaze to her. Petalpaw scoffed as she stepped forward a bit, her pale green eyes rolling.

"Is there a problem?" Cinderpaw growled, her copper eyes narrowed as she glared heatedly at the ShadowClan apprentice.

"Just surprised ThunderClan is training kits." Petalpaw meowed loftily.

Cinderpaw opened her mouth, ready to let loose a scathing response when Mistyrain's tail flicked her ear.

"We better be on our way. Have a good patrol." The grey warrior spoke, dipping her head politely before turning and leading her patrol back.
With a backwards glance, Cinderpaw caught Russetpaw judging his fellow apprentice gently, the two looking more relaxed as they turned to follow their mentors.

"Newtfang seemed extra smug, think Dawnstar is really doing well?" Violetshine spoke up as the patrol headed back towards camp.

"I heard that she's pretty sick, especially since she was made deputy within a few days of Flashstar dying." Meadowheart meowed. The grey tabby she-cat kept to herself a lot, usually spending her time with the medicine cats or her sisters.

"We'll inform Mudstar when we get back to camp." Mistyrain decided. "It may be nothing, but I don't like the way Heatherleaf kept eyeing the border."

Upon reaching camp, Cinderpaw was met with the excited gaze of Stormpaw, who sat waiting by his mentor.

"You excited? Our first day of battle training." Stormpaw grinned.

"Yeah of course! Is Rainpaw coming?"

"No. Owlflame took her hunting." Stormpaw shrugged. "She said he's planning on doing battle training later, with Bramblestorm." His voice turned bitter at the mention of the newly made warrior, his eyes narrowing.

"You don't care for him much, do you?" Cinderpaw meowed, her head tilting.

"No. I think he's arrogant and rude. It's a wonder how Honeypool is related to him." Stormpaw made a face.

"Stormpaw, Cinderpaw, come along." Pinefur called, his ears flicking as he stood waiting. Beside him, Mistyrain sat, her tail

curled around her paws as her mate Falconstrike nuzzled against her lovingly.

"Coming." Stormpaw meowed as he headed over, Cinderpaw trotting behind him. Upon reaching their mentors, the two apprentices watched as Falconstrike turned, catching up to what looked to be a patrol made up of Larktail, Smokefang, Tawnyfoot and Oakfur.

"You two ready? First battle training session." Pinefur grinned as he flicked Stormpaw's ears before leading them out of camp.

"Of course." Cinderpaw grinned as she followed them out of camp.

Upon reaching a large sandy clearjng, Mistyrain gestured for the two apprentices to sit. "This is the training hollow. You'll learn how to fight and defend yourselves here." She spoke. "Today we'll work on basic moves, and see how far we get."

"And remember, claws sheathed at all times." Pinefur meowed as he stepped forward. "Let's begin."

—

"...and then I pinned him again!" Cinderpaw meowed, her tail lashing as she bragged happily. It was closer to evening when their training bout had ended, Cinderpaw proving a quick learner as she managed to catch on to the moves the two warriors shown her and Stormpaw.

"Yes we get it." Honeypool muttered from her nest, her eyes rolling. The three apprentices and newly made warriors had retired to the apprentice den early, talking and discussing their days. They were soon joined by Ashwind, Sparkfire and Thornheart, three of the younger warriors. Thornheart seemed to be the most relaxed, his ginger pelt smooth and bright.

Soarkfire was funny, his mottled tabby fur thick and his body lean as he sat beside Stormpaw, the two laughing at a story Sparkfur was retelling.

Ashwind rolled his eyes at Honeypool, his speckled ginger tail

flicking. "Well I think you are gonna do fine Cinderpaw. I remember beating Sparkfur in our first training bout."

"I let him win." Sparkfire snickered, his eyes gleaming as Ashfire nudged him.

Honeypool wrinkled her nose, her ta flicking. "I still say you shouldn't brag too much."

Tigerfrost snorted as he stretched, his pelt rippling. "C'mon Honeypool, don't you remember your first day training?"

"She bragged to the whole camp about how she managed to pin Tawnyfoot down." Bramblestorm meowed, his voice low. He sat beside Rainpaw, the two having been speaking softly.

The group laughed as they shared jokes and stories, coming to a end as Sparkfur and his brothers left the den, leaving the others to begin to sleep.

Cinderpaw curled up in her nest, feeling the warmth from Tigerfrost's pelt as he settled in his nest beside her. With a purr she closed her eyes, her tail wrapping around her body as she drifted asleep.

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Cinderpaw jolted as the scent of rotting wood and marsh invaded her nose, her eyes glaring around curiously.

"Hello Cinderpaw, I'm glad to see you've joined me." The voice of Duskheart purred, causing Cinderpaw to turn around quickly. The dusty brown tom stood a few fox-lengths away, his eyes narrowed. "You prepared? And be warned; my training isn't for the weak."

Cinderpaw straightened, her chin lifted defiantly. "I'm not weak."

"Good," the tom smirked as he stepped forward. "Then let's begin."

chapter five

Rainpaw yawned as she sat up in her nest, giving her chest fur a few licks as she looked around the den.

Beside her nest, Bramblestorm slept soundly, his spiky pelt rising and falling as he snored. A few tail lengths away, Stormpaw laid in a heap of golden brown tabby fur, his eyes shut tight. Tigerfrost and Honeypool were gone already, probably on the dawn patrol by the look of how light it seemed outside.

Her eyes stopped on Cinderpaw, who tossed and turned a bit as she slept. Her silver fur looked mussed up, bristling slightly. Stepping forward a little, Rainpaw was greeted by the slight tang of blood, and peering closer, she could see a scratch on Cinderpaw's shoulder.

"Hey, what happened, you're bleeding." Rainpaw meowed, jostling her littermate awake worriedly.

Cinderpaw jerked awake, her copper eyes wide as they darted around before settling on Rainpaw. She relaxed, taking a deep breath as she sat up. "Hmm? Oh this?" She spoke, registering what Rainpaw had said as she glanced at her shoulder. "Must've been a thorn in my nest." She shrugged.

"You should get some herbs, it could get infected." Rainpaw meowed, her head tilting.

"No, I don't wanna bother Ravensight or Snowfall." Cinderpaw dismissed, her head shaking.

Rainpaw sighed. "Stay here, I'll be back." She spoke, hurrying out of the den before her littermate could respond.

She made her way to the medicine cat den, stepping inside and breathing in the scent of the herbs and moss. Inside the den smelt like mint leaves and moss, the scent she remembered coming off of Snowfall whenever the pale grey and white tom visited the nursery.

"Rainpaw? Is everything alright?" A calm, gentle mew spoke from further inside. She looked further, her eyes adjusting as she met eyes with a fluffy grey and white tom, his hazel eyes full of curiosity.

"Yeah, it's just-Cinderpaw has a scratch on her shoulder from a thorn in her nest. I was wondering if there was a herb she may need?" Rainpaw spoke softly.

"Of course. Come on." He smiled gently as he led her towards the far end of the den. As he crouched and began to look, Rainpaw's ears perked up at the sound of hushed voices.

"She'll more than likely need a bit of dock, that soothes scratches." Snowfall spoke, his voice soothing as he picked up a few leaves. "Just chew it up and lick the juices into her scratch. It'll sting a bit, but it should help."

Rainpaw nodded, her tail flicking as she sniffed at the herbs, recoiling at the sharp scent. "Okay, thank you Snowfall."

"You're welcome Rainpaw. Come visit again." He purred before turning, heading towards the side of the large den that housed his and Ravensight's nests.

She nodded, picking up the herbs. As she made her way towards the exit, the hushed voices grew a bit louder as if the owners were angry.

"...are apprentices! They shouldn't be sent on some hare-brained quest to find a so called lost clan." The voice of her mother seemed to ring higher than the rest, the silver shecat sounding upset. Taking a quick glance around, Rainpaw set the herbs down before freeing towards the voices slowly. She soon made it to the side of the den, where as she perked through a thin crack in one of the walls she could see Snowfall taking a seat next to Ravensight, the black furred medicine cat glaring heatedly at Skyfeather and Thistlefang. The two warriors looked angry, their pelts bristling while they squared off. Between the cats sat Mudstar, his dark brown frame large in comparison to Snowfall's small stature and Ravensight's thin body.

"I received the prophecy the night of their birth Skyfeather. 'A storm of cinders and rain will find the lost clan and bring it full circle. Then the four clans will be five and if not United, will fail against the coming darkness'. It's about Rainpaw, Cinderpaw and Stormpaw!" Ravensight hissed back, his sleek tail lashing furiously. "I don't like the idea of such young apprentices being the sole cats of a prophecy, but it is what StarClan has wished."

He sounded frustrated, his tail flicking back and forth. Thistlefang stepped forward then, opening his mouth to speak before Mudstar intervened.

"Snakestar came to me in a dream a couple nights ago. He said that there's a darkness coming that the clans had never witnessed before. That the prophecy must be completed and used in order to right and ancient betrayal. I didn't understand until now." He turned his pale gaze onto Skyfeather then, his voice softening. "I know it's hard to imagine your kits leaving, but they will come home safely. We will send six warriors with them, their mentors included, and we will make sure they are protected."

"But who, who will you send?" Thistlefang interrupted. "All the other warriors are here, have kits, families."

"I'll send the young ones. Tigerfrost, Bramblestorm and Honeypool. Those three, along with Pinefur, Owlflame and Mistyrain will protect the apprentices and help them in this quest." Mudstar decided.

"I'll go as well. It was my dream, I'll go with the questing cats to help in case someone gets sick or harmed." Ravensight spoke up, his eyes serious. He turned to look at the two warriors then, his voice solemn. "I won't let any of your kits be harmed."

Skyfeather sighed and nodded, her ears pinned back against her head. "I know you won't Ravensight. I trust you."

"Now. I will call a clan meeting, announce the quest. It's also the day that Sagefern and Briarleap's kits become apprentices as well." Mudstar sighed, rising to his paws.

Rainpaw hurried to grab the dock leaves as she watched the group begin to head towards the den, slipping outside the entrance quickly as Snowfall and Thistlefang re-entered through the back.

Rushing across the clearing, Rainpaw ducked into the apprentice den quickly, pleased to see Cinderpaw sitting up and waiting.

"Took you long enough." Cinderpaw meowed, her whiskers twitching. "Forgot where the den was?"

"No, but I think the clan will be surprised soon." Rainpaw meowed vaguely, sniffing at Cinderpaw's shoulder. "Stay still, I brought dock leaves to help."

"Oh-ow! That stings." Cinderpaw hissed as she flinched, her ears pinned back to her head as she frowned while Rainpaw continued to treat her scratch.

"Sorry, but doesn't it feel better?" Rainpaw meowed, pulling back after finishing.

Cinderpaw flexed her shoulder, brightening as she looked at her littermate. "It does! Thanks Rainpaw." She purred, rubbing her head against Rainpaw's cheek affectionately.

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"May all cats old enough to hunt gather for a clan meeting!" Mudstar's call came from outside, the sound of the clan gathering soon following after. Cinderpaw moved first, with Rainpaw following close behind.

As they entered the clearing, Rainpaw caught the leaf-green gaze of Bramblestorm, the spiky furred tom gesturing for her to come sit with him as he settled next to his littermate Honeypool.

She began to make her way over, stopping as Stormpaw appeared in her line of sight. "Hey." She purred softly, nudging his shoulder as he grinned.

"Sit with me? We can find a spot with Cinderpaw." He meowed, his voice warm. Stormpaw looked peaceful, his golden brown pelt

gleaming in the sunlight. Rainpaw nodded, turning and following her brother. Taking a quick glance back, she met the disappointed look Bramblestorm was giving her, one that melted into a gentle smile as he met her eyes.

Stormpaw sat down, his tail curling over his paws as he nudged Cinderpaw gently. "Scoot over," he huffed. "You're taking up all the room!"

Cinderpaw snorted, her eyes rolling as she shuffled over a bit, allowing Rainpaw to sit beside them. "Think it's an invasion?"

"I bet it's Lionkit and the others' apprentice ceremonies. They're six moons old soon." Stormpaw spoke, his shoulders shrugging.

"Hush!" The cranky voice of Sparrowstrike hissed, his eyes narrowed from his seat a few tail-lengths away. Rainpaw ducked her head to avoid the harsh glare her uncle gave them, Cinderpaw rolling her eyes.

"I have gathered you here today to do two things. One is to make some very special kits apprentices, but first, comes a revelation." Mudstar announced. He looked nervous, his pale green eyes searching the clan till they rested on his mate, Nightmist. The black furred shecat nodded encouragingly, Mudstar straightening up.

"Ravensight has received a prophecy that he believes is about a lost clan, one that has been long forgotten. This prophecy states that we must find this clan in order to bring the lake into a time of peace. I have decided to send a patrol to journey with Ravensight to find the lost clan." Mudstar spoke, pausing as the clan began muttering and chattering excitedly, only quieting as Dustyleaf yowled for their attention.

"After some careful consideration, and much input by the medicine cats and some senior warriors, I have made my choice. Leading the patrol, will be Owlflame. Those traveling alongside Owlflame and Ravensight are Pinefur, Mistyrain, Bramblestorm, Honeypool, Tigerfrost, Cinderpaw, Stormpaw and Rainpaw. " his words were met with uproar as many warriors leapt to their paws, the loudest being Larktail who hissed her anger.

"They're barely a moon into their apprenticeship! And those three are barely even warriors!" The grey tabby shecat hissed furiously, her tail lashing.

"My decision is final, Larktail." Mudstar growled, his eyes narrowed. "And my word is law."

Larktail stepped back, her tail lashing as she sulked.

"Now. They will head out tomorrow at dawn. But before we dismiss, it's time to make five kits into our newest apprentices. Lionkit, Hawkkit, Petalkit, Hazelkit and Breezekit, step forward."

The five kits stepped forward, each beaming as they did. Rainpaw purred as she watched Lionkit rush forward, his grey pelt bristling in excitement.

"You five have reached your sixth moon and are ready to become apprentices. Lionkit, from this day forward you will be known as Lionpaw. Ashwind, you will mentorLionpaw. Pass along your swiftness and courage." Mudstar watched as Lionpaw touched noses gently with his new mentor, the two toms beaming.

He continued to speak, his eyes flicking to settle on the tabby and white she lit in front of the others.
"Hazelkit, you will be known as Hazelpaw. Dustyleaf, you will mentor Hazelpaw and pass along the same fierce loyalty and honor you passed to Skyfeather."

His deputy stood up, his light green eyes full of excitement as he touched noses with the small apprentice.

"He hasn't had an apprentice since Skyfeather." Cinderpaw hissed, her tail flicking in excitement. "Trained by the clan deputy-lucky Hazelpaw!"

Rainpaw snorted, her ears pinned back to her head as she caught the sharp look Smokefang and his sister Duskpetal were giving the three older apprentices, Stormpaw scoffing as he stared back defiantly.

"Hawkkit, from this day on you will be known as Hawkpaw.

Falconstrike, you will mentor Hawkpaw and pass on the fierce cunning and ambition that Thistlefang passed onto you." Mudstar continued, watching as the grey and black striped kit eagerly touched noses with Falconstrike, the two toms speaking quietly before stepping aside.

Mudstar purred as he turned his attention to Breezekit. The small dark colored kit kneaded the ground impatiently, his stubby tail lashing.
"Breezekit, from this day forward you will be known as Breezepaw. Tawnyfoot, although a newer warrior, you will mentor young Breezepaw. Show him the dedication and quick thinking that makes a skilled warrior."
Tawnyfoot stepped forward, her dark copper eyes bright as she approached the newly made apprentice. Breezepaw met her quickly, touching noses as he meowed something that made the tabby warrior laugh.

"Petalkit, from today till you earn your warrior name you will be called Petalpaw. Spiderclaw, you mentored Thornheart well, and he is a fierce and courageous warrior. Pass on those qualities to Petalpaw." Mudstar's voice had grown soft, his eyes gentle as he watched Spiderclaw step forward.

Spiderclaw leaned down to touch noses with the timid apprentice, Petalpaw looking nervous as the clan began to chant the new apprentices' names loudly.

"All questing cats, go to the medicine cat den." Mudstar called, his voice carrying through the camp as he prepared himself to get down. As he reached the earth, he was met with Nightmist, the two speaking quietly before Sparrowstrike, Lightningtail, Thistlefang, Redpelt and Skyfeather, Sagefern and Larktail walking over soon after.

"Cmon, let's go!" Cinderpaw grinned, trotting towards the den. As she did, Rainpaw caught sight of Honeypool, Bramblestorm and Tigerfrost moving into the den. Rainpaw followed her siblings, ducking inside as she blinked to adjust to the darker den.

Inside, Pinefur, Mistyrain and Owlflame all sat waiting, Falconstrike

sitting close to his mate. Ravensight watched as the six new cats walked in, his ear flicking. "Good, it's time to discuss what we are doing."

"Where are we even going?" Tigerfrost meowed, taking a seat as his dark tabby tail wrapped around his body. Honeypool copied his movements, her head tilting.

Bramblestorm moved, sitting next to Rainpaw as his tail wrapped around the she-cat. Rainpaw was aware of the way Stormpaw stiffened as the light brown tabby tom sat down, her brother shuffling away. Cinderpaw paid them no mind, her eyes fixed on Ravensight.

"I received a prophecy the night of Cinderpaw, Rainpaw and Stormpaw's birth. Two cats, claiming to be apart of an ancient clan called SkyClan, came to me and said 'the storm of Cinders and rain will bring the lost clan full circle to defeat the coming darkness. But beware, when one clan falls, all fail." Ravensight spoke solemnly, his pale green gaze serious.

Falconstrike cleared his throat, his amber eyes soft as he looked at the medicine cat. *'His brother.'* Rainpaw thought, watching the two speak.

"You keep an eye out on this one, she'll need it." His tone was teasing as he glanced at Mistyrain, the grey shecat rolling her eyes. With a grin, Falconstrike stood and stretched, dipping his head before leaving the den.

"So what, we follow three apprentices?" Honeypool meowed, her voice low with distrust and disbelief.

"No. We head towards the Mountains. Mudstar had a dream with the previous ThunderClan leader that spoke of the prophecy. We head towards the mountains and beyond." Ravensight corrected her. "You six were chosen for a reason."

"And what reason was that?" Tigerfrost spoke up, his head tilting. "Three new warriors, three apprentices and three older warriors? And a medicine cat?"

"To build the new clan." Rainpaw. blurted out, stepping back as the group turned to stare at her.

"Go on." Bramblestorm meowed gently, his voice as soft as feathers. "What do you mean?"

Sucking in a breath, Rainpaw glanced around, her shoulders straightening as she met the encouraging look from Owlflame. "If the clan is lost, maybe we have to re-build it? Teach them the warrior code and how to be a clan. Three warriors who know of how to lead a patrol, helping whoever becomes the leader and deputy. Ravensight can inform the new medicine cat, Bramblestorm, Honeypool and Tigerfrost could help new warriors, and my siblings and I can help apprentices learn their duties. We have a larger patrol to help build the clan back." She felt sure, the encouraging looks from both Owlflame and Bramblestorm helping her feel more confident.

She could feel both Cinderpaw and Stormpaw's eyes on her, and with a rush of excitement she noted the looks of approval on the warriors' faces, Honeypool nodding her head agreeably.

"Good job Rainpaw." Ravensight meowed, his normally distant gaze warm with approval. "The rest of you, get some rest. In the morning we'll get some traveling herbs before heading out. Use tonight to say goodbye."

Rainpaw nodded as she turned following the rest of the patrol out. As they entered the clearing, she was met with the impressed faces of her littermate. "What?"

"You did good, really good." Cinderpaw meowed. "You sounded like a true warrior."

"Owlflame and Ravensight both looked impressed. I'm proud of you." Stormpaw purred as he nudged his sister playfully, Rainpaw beaming.

"You three better be on your best behavior." Skyfeather's voice spoke from behind them, the silver shecat stepped forward. Even after all the battles she must've fought in, her silver tabby pelt was

still sleek and beautiful, her pale blue eyes soft. Beside her, Thistlefang looked incredibly proud, his golden brown pelt that resembled his only son so much looked sleek and freshly groomed.

"We will." Cinderpaw grinned. "Promise."

"Take care of each other, you hear?" Thistlefang meowed sternly, touching his nose to their cheeks in turn. "You three are littermates, that's a bond that can never be broken."

"Cherish your time together and protect each other." Skyfeather meowed. "Don't let each other go."

Rainpaw nodded determinedly, her chin lifting. She remembered the story of the battle with Duskheart, how the evil tom had been the cause for so many loosing their families. Skyfeather herself had lost her brother, Hawkflight, who had been Duskpetal and Smokefang's father and Larktail's mate, along with her half-brother Troutfur.

"Good. Go ahead and sleep, you need your rest." Skyfeather meowed as she nuzzled them, watching as the three apprentices headed into the den.

chapter six

He crept forward, his tabby tail stiff and his movements sure as he tracked the small creature.

With a grin, he watched as the rabbit nibbled on a piece of grass, it's attention clouded by the promise of food as the predator stalked it. With a baring of his teeth, the golden brown tabby crouched lower, his legs gathering before he sprang, catching the rabbit between his paws quickly. As he leaned down to kill it, he was shocked to hear a female voice speak.

"*Wake up.*" *The voice spoke, Stormpaw straightening in confusion.*

"I said wake up!" Stormpaw jolted awake as he felt a paw jab into his ribs, causing him to hiss grumpily.
He blinked, his copper eyes adjusting to the den before he made out the figure of Honeypool standing over him, the light brown tabby shecat waiting impatiently.

Stormpaw yawned, his tail flicking as he sat up. "What's going on?" He grumbled tiredly, shaking his head as he glanced around the den. The other nests were empty, save for Lionpaw, Breezepaw, and Hazelpaw. '*Spiderclaw and Thornheart must've taken Hawkpaw and Petalpaw out for a dawn patrol.*' He thought, his ear flicking before Honeypool cleared her throat.

"We have to go get our traveling herbs, remember?" She spoke, her eyes narrowed. "Rainpaw, Cinderpaw, Tigerfrost and Bramblestorm have already headed to Ravensight's den." She nudged him again, her whiskers twitching. "Get up!"

"I'm up!" He huffed, shaking his pelt out before following her out of the den. Outside, he watched as Cherrythorn and Sparrowstrike shared tongues, their ears pricked as they listened to Ashwind and Sparkfire argue. The two ginger pelted toms looked excited, as their parents traded amused looks.

Next to the fresh-kill pile, Meadowheart crouched as she shared a thrush with a purring Snowfall. The warrior and medicine cat spoke quietly, their pelts barely brushing as they interacted.

Stormpaw glanced ahead, ducking to follow Honeypool inside the medicine cat den. Inside, he saw Rainpaw and Bramblestorm sitting together, the larger tom murmuring something quietly to the slate colored apprentice.

Across from them, Tigerfrost, Cinderpaw, Owlflame and Pinefur crouched, lapping up a few herbs as Ravensight nudged the small piles towards them. "Hey Stormpaw!" Cinderpaw chirped, her eyes bright.

"Hey. Where's Mistyrain?" He meowed, taking a seat beside Rainpaw, who smiled sweetly at him before leaning down to accept the herbs Ravensight pushed her way.

"Oh she's off saying her farewells to Falconstrike. Then I think she was heading over to RiverClan, say goodbye to her brother." Owlflame meowed, his tongue swiping over his jaws as he sat up.

"Streamheart and Mistyrain have always been close. I'm sure he'll be worried." Ravensight meowed, pushing a bundle of herbs towards Stormpaw. "He won't tell anyone of the quest."

"That must be hard, leaving a littermate in a different clan." Honeypool murmured, her ears flicking back as she glanced over at Bramblestorm, who blinked affectionately at her.

"Yeah.." Cinderpaw meowed in agreement, looking concerned as her copper eyes trailed over first Rainpaw, then Stormpaw.

"I think we should try to get past the horseplace today. Make camp possibly closer to the other side of it?" Owlflame suggested, his ear flicking.

Pinefur nodded before turning his gaze onto Ravensight. "What do you think Ravensight? Think we should get that far?"

Ravensight sat down again, his tail curled around his paws as his head tilted thoughtfully. "I think we could make it further towards

the mountains even. The further we make it today, the better. I'd like to try and make sure we at least have a chance to rest and hunt." He suggested.

"Do medicine cats even know how to hunt?" Cinderpaw spoke up, her head tilted.

"Cinderpaw!" Rainpaw spoke up, her blue eyes wide as she scolded their sister.

Stormpaw snorted, his head shaking at the surprised look Cinderpaw gave the soft spoken she-cat.

"What? I was just asking!" Cinderpaw huffed, her nose stuck into the air. Beside her, Tigerfrost snickered, his dark blue eyes full of amusement.

"It's quite alright Rainpaw. And yes Cinderpaw, medicine cats do know how to hunt. I also know how to fight, although I attribute that to Falconstrike more than Snowfall." Ravensight meowed, his eyes fixated on the silver tabby, who nodded in approval of his answer.

"I see Mistyrain and Falconstrike entering camp. Shall we prepare?" Pinefur offered, rising to his paws.

"Yes. We will leave shortly." Ravensight meowed, his ear flicking.

"Get some prey, share with your friends before we leave." Pinefur instructed Stormpaw, his ear flicking.

Stormpaw nodded, turning and slipping out of the den quickly. Once outside, he caught Mistyrain and Falconstrike making their way into camp, the two close together as they padded into the medicine cat den, Mistyrain's tail touching Stormpaw's shoulder politely.

"Stormpaw!" A soft voice spoke up, the owner of it standing in front of him when he turned his head.

Standing there, her tabby and white pelt groomed neatly, stood Hazelpaw. Her light blue eyes were full of excitement, and as she

watched him carefully Stormpaw's ears flicked.

"Yes?" He mewed, his eyes trained on her. She had grown, her thin frame sleek.

"Wanna share a rabbit with Breezepaw and I? Rainpaw, Cinderpaw and Petalpaw are eating over by Hawkpaw and Lionpaw." Hazelpaw offered, her whiskers twitching. Stormpaw nodded, watching as the new apprentice beamed before leading him towards the apprentice den, their den mates sitting in a semi-circle as they ate and joked.

"Are you three excited? Getting to go on a quest?" Lionpaw meowed, his yellow eyes bright.

"Kind of. I'll miss everyone." Rainpaw admitted as she swallowed the bit of prey in her mouth.

"It's not like we're never coming back, we're gonna find whatever it is Ravensight says we need to, then we will be home." Cinderpaw promised.

Stormpaw sat down, blinking gratefully at Hazelpaw as she nudged a rather large rabbit towards him. Aware of the curious look Breezepaw sent his way, Stormpaw bent down and bit into the rabbit, his eyes closing briefly at the flavor.

"I think it'll be fun. Complete adventure." Cinderpaw continued, her voice full of excitement.

"Hopefully no more thorns in your nest, I don't know how many herbs we can find on the way." Rainpaw teased, her ear flicking as she nodded towards the faint scratch along Cinderpaw's shoulder.

Stormpaw's ear flicked as his bronze eyes glanced up, studying the faint look of nervousness that passed over his silver furred sister's face, her copper eyes darkening for a split second before she laughed.

Stormpaw chuckled slightly, still a bit unsettled by the way Cinderpaw reacted. He was brought out of it as Pinefur called for them, his eyes looking to see the dark tom waiting by the camp entrance, the others beside him.

"Goodbye, we'll see you as soon as we can." Rainpaw promised, her tail flicking over Hawkpaw's ear affectionately as the younger tom sighed.

"Be safe! May StarClan light your path!" Petalpaw meowed gently, her eyes soft

The three apprentices mewed their goodbyes before hurrying to meet with their patrol, pausing to say goodbye a few times.

Stormpaw glanced back as the patrol left camp, the vision of his parents staring after them worriedly imprinted in his head.

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"Which way are we going next?" Cinderpaw chirped, trotting to catch up with Mistyrain, Pinefur and Ravensight, her mentor chuckling before answering.

"We'll travel the edge of ShadowClan territory. We'll make it past the horseplace, then a bit further on." Mistyrain explained patiently, her copper eyes gentle.

Cinderpaw nodded brightly before dropping back, falling into step with Tigerfrost as the tom padded along. The two fell into an easy conversation, their steps matching.

Honeypool walked just behind him, her ear flicking back as she and Owlflame spoke, the speckled tom nodding along to her words. Stormpaw sped up a bit, coming to walk alongside the pair. Glancing back, he watched as Rainpaw and Bramblestorm walked together, Bramblestorm smiling as he and the blueish grey she-cat conversed.

"Stormpaw, Owlflame just told me how you seem to be catching onto hunting really quickly." Honeypool mentioned, her blue eyes friendly.

"Yeah, Pinefur says I'm showing a good amount of potential. Of course, he could be saying that to boost my confidence." Stormpaw admitted, his ears flicking back. He did feel confident about his hunting so far; he enjoyed it and often looked forward to his days

when all Pinefur asked was for him to hunt.

"Nonsense. Pinefur wouldn't just say that. He really believes you'll be an excellent hunter." Owlflame assured him, his normally fierce yellow eyes kind. Stormpaw felt a rush of surprise at how easily the short-tempered tom gave his approval, his own eyes staring into the older tom's.

"Rainpaw is an exceptional tracker already. She's very quick about it too." Owlflame meowed proudly, glancing back at his apprentice.

"Rainpaw's always been good at it." Stormpaw meowed automatically, his whiskers twitching as he spoke again. "When we were in the nursery, she was always the first to find everyone when we played hide and seek. Cinderpaw hated it because Rainpaw could track us so easily."

"Cinderpaw is proving to be rather good in battle skills, from what Mistyrain has said." Owlflame meowed, nodding towards the silver apprentice.

Honeypool snorted, her blue eyes rolling. "Cinderpaw can be rather...arrogant." She spoke, her voice low as she watched the silver shecat in front of her. Cinderpaw was trotting alongside Tigerfrost, her tail high as she spoke to the tom.

"She's really kind. She just can be difficult." Stormpaw spoke up defensively, his pelt prickling at the way the warrior spoke about his sister.

"I think every litter has their opposites. Pinefur is more laidback and fun-loving than I am, and I'm more temperamental. Mistyrain is rather patient and gentle, and her littermate Streamheart is snappish and blunt." Owlflame meowed as he interrupted.

"I can't imagine leaving Bramblestorm in a completely different clan.." Honeypool meowed, her ear flicking backward. "I'd be lost without my brother."

"Mistyrain suffered a lot of criticism for joining ThunderClan. It really upset her when she first joined and Streamheart, then

Streampaw, refused to have anything to do with her. Then she got sick with green cough and almost died. Rainstar allowed Streamheart to come to our camp and assist in healing her. They've been better for it." Owlflame explained.

Stormpaw blinked slowly, his thoughts racing. He couldn't imagine almost loosing either of his sisters. Sure Cinderpaw was loud and obnoxious at times, but she was also fiercely loyal and kind. And Rainpaw was gentle and sweet, always willing to lend a paw to anyone in need.

"We're almost to ShadowClan terripry. We could skirt around it, but then we wouldn't reach the horseplace till well after nightfall. Should we wait and get an escort across?" Pinefur spoke as he halted at the scent line, the group waiting as well.

Ravensight was the one to decide, his green eyes glittering slightly. "I say we wait. I'd rather ask for an escort across and make it further than wait till later."

Glancing around, the medicine cat was met with a chorus of agreement, causing him to sit down and the others to follow.

Stormpaw found himself sitting next to Tigerfrost and Cinderpaw, the two laughing as they joked. Across from them, Mistyrain and Ravensight spoke quietly, the two glancing at the border every now and then.

Pinefur and Owlflame stood watching, their eyes fixed on the trees warily. Honeypool had sat beside Bramblestorm and Rainpaw, the three of them conversing happily.

It wasn't long before Stormpaw heart the murmur of new voices, and standing up he was met with the sight of a dark grey tabby tom, leading a light ginger furred shecat with white paws, a cream colored shecat and a tawny and white furred shecat.

"Newtfang." Pinefur greeted politely, stepping forward carefully.

"Actually," the grey tabby tom spoke, his copper eyes shining. "It's Newtstar."

Pinefur and Owlflame traded surprised looks, Mistyrain stepped forward.

"Dawnstar died? How?" She meowed softly.

It was the light ginger shecat who spoke, her pale green eyes grief-stricken. "She died from a bad case of whitecough." She meowed softly.

"These are her kits, Petalpaw and Ivypaw." Newtstar meowed as he gestured between the two golden shecats. The other one, a creamy shecat with sharp features, looked bored, her eyes narrowed. "But what can I do for you?"

"We are on a quest, and would appreciate an escort to the horseplace possibly?" Ravensight meowed, steppibg forward. "I'd like to avoid the time it would take to skirt your territory."

"I shall grant you safe passage." Newtstar promised, his eyes softening at the sight of Ravensight. "I owe you for what you did in helping ease my mother's travel to StarClan."

"Nettlebreeze was a kind and incredibly skilled warrior. She was one of the few to be kind to me when I first became apart of ThunderClan. It was my honor to be able to give her peace." Ravensight meowed gently, his eyes closing briefly.

"Your words are appreciated. Now come along, I'm sure you are eager to begin your journey!" Newtstar meowed, beckoning for them to follow him as he turned.

As they crossed, Stormpaw found himself walking alongside Petalpaw. The ginger furred apprentice looked tired, her light green eyes saddened and her movements slow.

"I'm sorry, about your mother. I couldn't imagine loosing mine or any of my siblings." He meowed sincerely, watching as she glanced at him.

"Cinderpaw, she's your sister? She nearly clawed my ears off the last time I saw her. She has a sharp tongue." Petalpaw meowed, walking carefully.

"Yeah, she can be rather harsh, but let anyone hurt mine or our sister Rainpaw's feelings and she gets furious.@ Stormpaw meowed, his whiskers twitching.

Petalpaw smiled, her spirits lifting slightly. "That's how Ivypaw is with me and our sister Seedpaw. Seedpaw is rather quiet though."

"That's Rainpaw too. She's really kind and quiet." Stormpaw meowed, gesturing towards the blue-grey shecat who stuck close to Bramblestorm, the brown tabby tom watching her carefully.

Petalpaw let out a mroww in amusement, turning her head as she continued to walk. As the group moved, Stormpaw's eyes wandered the area curiously, taking note of the pine and evergreen trees around them, the overwhelming scent of pine needles and marsh, and the way all the trees had thin, spindly trunks. It was nothing like ThunderCkan's territory, full of lush woods and deep undergrowth. Here, Stormpaw felt eerily on edge, the lack of proper undergrowth making him feel exposed.

As they reached what must've been the other side of the scent line, Newtstar stopped.

"This is where I leave you. Safe travels and I hope you find whatever you're looking for." He meowed, touching his nose to Ravensight's carefully.

"Thank you Newtstar, and good luck in your leadership, you'll do grand." Ravensight responded warmly as he looked at the new ShadowClan leader.

The group of ThunderClan cats made their way across the border, Stormpaw making sure to keep an eye on both his sisters as they did so. Once they left the clan's territory, Stormpaw found himself to be trodding on more soil-like ground, less marsh and pine needles. He felt a rush of relief at the feeling of dirt beneath his paws, his tail flicking happily.

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"It's almost sun-down.." Ravensight sighed "I think we should make

camp here tonight."

They had made it past the horseplace a bit ago, and now had paused in a clearing that bordered a stream. Stormpaw glanced around, noting the way the tree roots and trunks seemed to form a perimeter around the clearing.

"Then we'll stay here for tonight. Honeypool, Stormpaw and Mistyrain, can you find some moss possibly? Just a bit to make it more comfortable. Tigerfrost, Cinderpaw, Owlflame and I will go hunt. Bramblestorm and Rainpaw, help Ravensight with whatever he may need." Pinefur instructed, having taken on the role of leader quiet easy. The group nodded their assent before splitting up, Stormpaw turning to follow the two shecats as they headed out of the clearing.

"We should try the stream, Moss grows close to most of them back home." Honeypool suggested, glancing at her companions.

"Sounds good to me. Stormpaw?" Mistyrain meowed, her voice directed at the golden furred tom.

"I-uh, yeah that's fine." Stormpaw stammered, his thoughts swarming his head.

As the three began to search for more moss, Stormpaw found himself absentmindedly clawing at a piece of moss he found clinging to a rock. His ear flicked back as he glanced over, taking note of the growing pile of the plant that had piled beside him, Honeypool appearing a few heartbeats after with her own bundle of it.

"Let's get back, I'm sure everyone has returned." She meowed, setting the bundle down briefly. Stormpaw nodded as he picked up his bundle and padded after her, his tail flicking.
As they're watched the make-shift camp, they were joined by Mistyrain, who's smokey pelt was littered with scraps of debris.

"Good. Pinefur and the others just returned with prey." Ravensight meowed as he greeted the three, his tail gesturing to the others.

Stormpaw set his bundle down, gratefully blinking at Cinderpaw as she gestured for him to join her and Tigerfrost in sharing a rather large rabbit.

"Who caught this?" He meowed, crouching down easily. Cinderpaw grinned, her chin lifting proudly as Tigerfrost laughed.

"Cinderpaw did." The dark tabby meowed, his ear flicking as he nodded to the silver apprentice. "She caught this and that mouse Ravensight is eating."

"Good job." Stormpaw praised, pride filling him at how well his sister had hunted. Around them, their travel companions ate and spoke, their voices gentle. Ravensight, Owlflame, Pinefur and Mistyrain spoke quietly, their focus on the black furred medicine cat.

Honeypool and Bramblestorm sat with Rainpaw, the three eating on a thrush and a squirrel.

"Let's get some rest, we have a long day of traveling." Ravensight called as the cats drew to the end of their meal. With a murmur of assent, Owlflame and Mistyrain took one of the bundles and began to spread it out, making a rather large nest.

Honeypool and Cinderpaw began to spread another nest, pausing as Bramblestorm took a part of the last bundle and made a smaller one, his eyes flicking to Rainpaw as the blue grey shecat stood beside him.

"Goodnight." Mistyrain yawned as she laid down, Ravensight curled up on one side and Pinefur on the other. Owlflame purred softly, staying standing as he glanced around.

"I'll take first watch." The speckled tom offered, his legs stretching. "I'm not tired. I'll wake you up after a while." He spoke directly to Pinefur, who nodded as he closed his eyes.

Cinderpaw, Tigerfrost and Honeypool took up another large nest, Cinderpaw gesturing for Stormpaw to join them. As he passed over, he watched as Rainpaw and Bramblestorm curled up beside each

other, the light brown tom licking between her ears as his sister curled up beside him.

Stepping into the nest, Stormpaw laid down, feeling Honeypool's tail graze his side and Tigerfrost's foot brush against his shoulder. As he laid still listening to the sound of the forest around them, he felt a rush of curiosity and wonder as he stared up at the stars.

'I hope we find what you sent us for.'

chapter seven

"Faster! I just clawed Rainpaw's ears and now I'm going for your mother's neck!"

The words sent a surge of white-hot rage through Cinderpaw, her paws moving quickly as she slashed and clawed at the dusty brown furred cat viciously. She let out a yowl of anger as she felt him heave, her body being tossed into a tree trunk. She rose, turning and lunging at him again as she slashed across his cheek, blood splattering the ground. With a low snarl, he struck back, a heavy paw smacking her shoulder roughly. Letting out a pained grunt, Cinderpaw felt her legs buckle, her smaller body aching as she fell to the forest floor.

"Better. Much better." Duskheart rasped as he watched her carefully, his tail lashing. "You must be that quick at all times. Had I been an actual rogue, or even a fox, I would've snapped Rainpaw's neck before you could've stopped me. You want to protect your family and clan? Correct?"

"Of course I do!" Cinderpaw snapped, shakily rising to her paws as her tail flicked. "Can we do it again?"

It was her third night training with the shadowy warrior, and already she felt as if she was getting better. At first she had hesitated at the thought of allowing such a hated and disloyal cat to be her mentor in her dreams, but at the prospect of becoming a great warrior and making everyone proud, Cinderpaw had relented.

Duskheart had proved to be a rough, if not completely merciless teacher. He often pushed her till she grew furious, and would only spar with her with claws unsheathed. Despite the harshness of his mentoring, Cinderpaw was glad to see it paid off at times. She had found that she felt more balanced during her hunting, her movements more quick and decisive. Mistyrain had chalked up her progress to Cinderpaw's mumbled excuses of practicing on her own, and the silver apprentice didn't see a reason to inform her mentor of the cat stalking her dreams.

"Maybe tomorrow night. It's almost dawn and your clanmates will be waking." Duskheart purred, his features smoothing. "Besides, I'm sure your siblings would get worried if you woke up with sore muscles from our training. And if not them, Tigerfrost."

Cinderpaw ducked her head at the mention of Tigerfrost. The large black tom with dark blue eyes had often been an important part of her day. He was funny, with a way of making her laugh and of infuriating her like no one else could. Cinderpaw knew she wasn't the only one who noticed; Honeypool, a light brown tabby shecat with white paws and judgmental blue eyes, had often hovered over Tigerfrost, glaring at Cinderpaw as if she was nothing more than a pesky flea. A rush of contempt and frustration shot through Cinderpaw at the thought of the warrior she-cat. Honeypool seemed to always have a problem with her, and it took all of Cinderpaw's self control to not claw the brown tabby's ears.

Duskheart grinned, his eyes sparking. "If only Honeypool knew you were being trained in skills she couldn't even imagine.." his words were smooth and low, his voice as sly as a snake as he gave voice to the dark thoughts cultivating in the silver tabby's head.

She tossed him a wild grin, her copper eyes narrowing as the forest began to fade around her. "If only she knew."

Cinderpaw sat up, wincing at the feeling of her sore back and shoulders. Duskheart hadn't lied when he spoke of her sore muscles; each one felt as if it was on fire. Cinderpaw herself felt as if she had been dragged throughout the whole of ThunderClan territory!
It certainly didn't help that the clan cats had slept on thin nests of moss, the hardness of the ground hardly compared to the soft sandy earth that covered the apprentice den back home.

Stretching, the silver tabby looked around at her companions. Honeypool, Pinefur and Stormpaw were gone, possibly out hunting, and Mistyrain and Falconstrike were speaking quietly. A couple tail-lengths away, Rainpaw slept soundly, Bramblestorm curled up around her. Owlflame was nowhere to be seen; the speckled tom was probably keeping watch from some hidden perch.

Tigerfrost snored beside her, and with a twitch of her whiskers Cinderpaw rolled her eyes. She jabbed at his side with a claw,

snorting as he jerked awake. "Finally. You snore as loud as a badger!"

"Shut up. At least I don't fidget in my sleep." The dark tom grumbled, blinking groggily as his midnight colored eyes adjusted. "Where is everyone?"

"Honeypool, Pinefur and Stormpaw are probably hunting, Owlflame is possibly still on guard duty. Mistyrain and Ravensight are talking, and Bramblestorm and Rainpaw are asleep." Cinderpaw stretched, her ear flicking as Tigerfrost snorted.

"Look at them," he nodded towards the still forms of the young warrior and apprentice curled up together. "I think she's the only one who he speaks with kindly, even to Honeypool and I."

"He's always been gentle with Rainpaw. It's hard not to be; she's the kind one of our litter." Cinderpaw remarked as she began to groom herself. It was true; Rainpaw was the kind-hearted one. She was always willing to help, always sweet and soft. Cinderpaw often envied her sister for how mild mannered and gentle she was. Cinderpaw was also a bit envious of how cool and collected Stormpaw could be, the golden tom able to mask a lot of his emotions easily. Compared to the two of her littermates, she felt like a blazing fire in the middle of a snowstorm and a fresh stream. Cinderpaw was loud, headstrong and at times, reckless. Stormpaw was cold and distant, but he at least knew when to speak up. And Rainpaw was gentle and kind, soft and sweet.

"She may be kind. But you are too. Don't think you can go unnoticed when you take the time to specifically bring Mossheart and the other elders their favorite kinds of prey." Tigerfrost meowed gently, his tail flicking over her ear. "Stormpaw may act distant, but I've seen him get rather flustered whenever he's complimented."

"He's a fantastic hunter already, and Rainpaw is a quick tracker." Cinderpaw meowed, pride edging into her voice.

"Your father and his brothers are like that. Sparrowstrike was always a good hunter, and Lightningtail was said to be the best tracker in the clan." Tigerfrost meowed before grinning. "Thistlefang

was the best at fighting."

"The best huh?" Cinderpaw meowed thoughtfully, her head running with the idea of her and her siblings sharing characteristics with their father and uncles. The more she thought of it, the more likely it seemed.

Rainpaw was a lot like Lightningtail; the two were quiet, thoughtful and gentle, with an air of kindness that made others feel at ease. Sparrowstrike was more fiery than Stormpaw, but the two were fierce in different ways. The dark brown tabby tom seemed to be hotheaded, brash and blunt, while Stormpaw was icy and cold. Stormpaw did share his uncle's habit of getting frustrated easily.

Cinderpaw's whiskers twitched. "Do you often sit around comparing others to their kin?" Her tone was teasing and light, Tigerfrost's own navy eyes rolling in amusement.

"Perhaps. I tend to take notice of those that interest me." He sat up, stretching as he watched her.

"So i interest you?" Cinderpaw smirked, her chin lifted proudly. She didn't know where this flirting came from, only that Tigerfrost was the first to bring it out so easily.

"I didn't say that, maybe I'm interested in your brother. After all, he would make a fine deputy when I'm leader." The black furred warrior grinned cheekily, his eyes sparking as he watched her.

"Oh you mean when *I* am leader? Grand idea. Cinderstar has a nice ring to it, don't you think?" Cinderpaw grinned, her copper eyes gleaming as she watched her companion laugh. She was faintly aware of the stirrings of Bramblestorm and Rainpaw, the two slowly coming to the world of the waking.

"Tigerstar the mighty leader of ThunderClan, and his loyal, although stubborn, friend Cinderpaw." He teased. "I like the sound of that!"

"Please." She snorted, her eyes rolling.

"I think Cinderpaw would be a fine leader." Rainpaw's gentle meow

sounded as the sleepy looking she-cat approached them, coming to sit next to her littermate. Rainpaw's normal sleek slate colored pelt was fluffed up, her blue eyes clouded with grogginess as she yawned.

"And Rainpaw would be my loyal deputy." Cinderpaw grinned as she turned to face Tigerfrost with a cocky look.

Bramblestorm joined them, his light brown tabby fur still as spiky as ever. His pale green eyes, normally frosty and harsh, were soft and warm as he looked at Rainpaw. "I think Tigerstar has a nicer ring to it than Cinderstar." He drawled teasingly, his whiskers twitching as Rainpaw snorted.

"Yeah right, Cinderpaw is so much more fun." Rainpaw grinned brightly.

Cinderpaw smiled, taken aback at how relaxed her sister looked. Rainpaw looked carefree and happy, her ear flicking as she played with the warrior. Bramblestorm looked as relaxed and happy as Rainpaw did, the two grinning as they spoke.

'*I think that's the most confident I've ever seen her.*' Cinderpaw thought, her whiskers twitching as she watched the way Bramblestorm's jokes and smiled made her normally shy sister perk up.

"And what if I become leader then?" Rainpaw grinned, her eyes sparking. "Rainstar of ThunderClan."

"When I, Bramblestar become leader, I may let you be my deputy." Bramblestorm grinned, ducking as Rainpaw playfully swiped at his ears. "That's no way to act to your future leader."

"He's right." Tigerfrost grinned as he launched himself at Bramblestorm, pinning the leaner tom down. "Don't get so sassy with Rain*star!*"

"What is going on?" Stormpaw's cool voice spoke, Cinderpaw turning to watch her golden pelted brother pad towards them, Honeypool at his side. The brown tabby shecat tossed a disdainful look towards Cinderpaw, causing the silver apprentices' pelt to lift.

'*If only you knew what I was doing while you're dreaming.*' Cinderpaw thought, her nose wrinkling distastefully

"Oh just discussing whether or not any of us could become clan leader." Tigerfrost spoke up, allowi mg Bramblestorm to sit up again.

"Tigerfrost here thinks he or Bramblestorm could do it, but I think either me or Rainpaw." Cinderpaw added, her ear flicking.

Honeypool shrugged, her blue eyes staring longingly at Tigerfrost. "I think Tigerstar sounds good."

"Please, I think what's better than all of it is Stormstar." Stormpaw grinned, his golden eyes shining with humor as he sat down beside Rainpaw.

Cinderpaw laughed as Rainpaw nudged her brother, the two shecats sharing an amused look. As rare as it was, Cinderpaw loved when Stormpaw joked around and relaxed. He was often so serious that when he truly was relaxed, it made the golden brown tabby even more fun to be around.

"Alright, gather round." Owlflame called as he stepped out of the trees, his yellow eyes serious. "We need to figure out where we go from here. Ravensight? Anything?"

"I haven't received any signs from StarClan. The prophecy isn't much help either." Ravensight sighed, his eyes glimmering with frustration.

Rainpaw looked suddenly nervous, her paws kneading the ground anxiously. Cinderpaw narrowed her eyes at her littermate curiously, her tail flicking.

"We should continue through the valley. Towards the setting sun." Rainpaw blurred out, her ears pinned against her head as the warriors turned to eye her. "I had a dream last night. A cat told me to head that way."

"What did this cat look like?" Ravensight meowed quietly, his eyes fixated on the apprentice. Bramblestorm pressed against Rainpaw,

offering an encouraging nod as she glanced up at him.

"She was tall, with white and cream fur and yellow eyes. She said you'd know her, and that in order to find what was lost we should journey through the valley towards the setting sun." Rainpaw meowed, shooting a nervous look towards Owlflame.

Cinderpaw traded a shocked look with Stormpaw. Rainpaw had been visited by a StarClan cat? Owlflame stepped closer to his apprentice, his tail resting over her shoulders encouragingly.

"That's Lillyspots. She was the medicine cat before Snowfall." Ravensight meowed. "If she says we must travel through the valley, then we must."

"Hold on, we're gonna wander around because of the dream of an apprentice barely out of the nursery?" Honeypool interrupted, her eyes narrowed. "Who's to say she didn't just imagine it and think that's what happened?"

Bramblestorm stiffened, his ears pinned to his head as he glared at his sister angrily. "Rainpaw wouldn't lie about that. She said she met a StarClan cat, so she did." He meowed firmly, his eyes narrowed into slits.

"Honeypool, unless you have another idea I think that Ravensight is correct." Pinefur meowed calmly, his ear flicking as he addressed the younger warrior.

"If we get lost it's her fault." Honeypool murmured, ignoring the warning hiss her littermate sent her way.

Cinderpaw frowned, her dislike for the pretty brown tabby growing more. "My sister doesn't lie." She repeated, shooting the warrior an annoyed look as she moved, her pelt pressing against Rainpaw's comfortingly.

"Rainpaw, are you sure that Lillyspots said through the valley towards the setting sun?" Owlflame addressed his apprentice directly, his eyes staring into hers. At her nod, he straightened, his tail lifting. "Then let's go. I trust my apprentice."

Ravensight nodded, taking the lead with Pinefur at his side. Mistyrain and Owlflame followed, with Honeypool trailing behind Tigerfrost and Bramblestorm. Cinderpaw found herself walking alongside her sister and Stormpaw, the golden apprentice nudging his blue furred sister affectionately.

"Cheer up Rainpaw, you did good." Stormpaw meowed gently, his features softening.

Rainpaw glanced up at him, her eyes hopeful. "You believe me?"

"Of course. So does Cinderpaw, Owlflame, Pinefur, and the others. Honeypool is just cranky." Stormpaw meowed reassuringly. "She's not sure of what to do, none of us are."

Cinderpaw nodded agreeably, her whiskers twitching. "Plus, she's always been a crabby fox, why let her ruin your day?" She felt relieved as Rainpaw cracked a smile, the lanky shecat perking up.

"Maybe we'll find others, ones to help find this lost whatever?" Stormpaw meowed.

Cinderpaw nodded, her copper eyes staring forward at the valley ahead. "What if whatever's lost, was lost for a reason?"

chapter eight

"Hey, you alright?" Ravensight meowed as he dropped back to walk alongside Rainpaw, his light green eyes concerned. "You're limping a little."

"My paws just ache a bit. I'm sure it's nothing." Rainpaw assured the medicine cat, her ear flicking.

"Well, if it continues let me know okay?" He meowed, his voice calm and friendly. "Have you ever been visited by a StarClan cat before?"

"I don't think so. Once when I was a kit, I dreamt I was in a shadowy forest, where everything smelled like death and hate. A cat spoke to me then, she had fiery ginger fur like Cherrythorn, but her eyes were blue and she was larger, with all these scars across her pelt. " Rainpaw explained, her pelt prickling. "She scared me. I could feel the darkness and hate coming off of her."

"That wasn't a StarClan cat. There are those that are too dark and dangerous for the starry hunting grounds. They go to a forest of shadows and danger, called the Dark Forest. I believe that the shecat who visited you may have been a member." Ravensight meowed softly, his eyes cloudy with sorry.

"I haven't seen her since. Until Lillyspots spoke with me, I hadn't met a single StarClan cat." Rainpaw spoke, her paws moving slowly. Ahead of them, Cinderpaw and Tigerfrost spoke as they padded alongside each other, Honeypool, Stormpaw and Bramblestorm following after. At the head, Owlflame, Pinefur and Mistyrain kept a sharp eye out.

"It's mainly medicine cats who are visited by StarClan. Or leaders." Ravensight spoke, his tail flicking. "I was five moons old when I first met a StarClan cat."

"Really? That young?" Rainpaw was impressed. She couldn't

imagine being so important that a StarClan cat would visit her.

'*But you've been visited by both a StarClan member and a dark-forest cat.'* She thought, her head shaking as Ravensight chuckled.

"Yes. My brother Falconstrike always wanted to be a warrior. He was fierce, brave, strong. He was my biggest protector as kits. Our mother tried to provide for us both when she was exiled from WindClan, but it was hard. Then your mother and Sagefern helped us, and brought us to Snakestar. He allowed us to join the clan and gave us a home." Ravensight meowed.

"How did you know you wanted to become a medicine cat?" Rainpaw questioned, her head spinning with questions.

"I think I've always known. I was always drawn to the medicine cat den in WindClan, and on the night before I turned six moons old, I was visited by WindClan's medicine cat from many moons before my birth. She introduced herself as Moonpetal, and she was the prettiest cat I had ever seen. Her fur was a snowy white, and her eyes were this pale shade of holly green. She was the first StarClan cat I had ever met. " Ravensight meowed, his voice wistful. "She told me that not all paths were the same, that some were meant for a lifetime of healing and deciphering prophecies."

"But medicine cats can never take a mate. Didn't you have someone you loved?" Rainpaw meowed, her eyes staring up at him curiously.

"I never wanted to have a mate. Although, some medicine cats fall in love and keep it secret." His voice was slightly bitter, his ears pinned to his head. Rainpaw studied him as he walked, her eyes roaming his pelt. Ravensight was always thin; a trait from his WindClan born mother. But he was lean as well, with slim features and a long tail. His night colored pelt was groomed neatly, and his pale green eyes looked like bits of grass in comparison with his pelt.

"Sometimes I'm not sure if I'm meant to be a warrior." Rainpaw admitted softly. The only sign from Ravensight that he heard was the flick of his ear, so Rainpaw continued to speak.

"I want to be a warrior, I do. But I see Cinderpaw and how brave

and string she is, and Stormpaw's skill in hunting, and I can't help but feel I'll never catch up to them." Rainpaw admitted quietly. "Cinderpaw could be leader, she's so determined and strong, and Stormpaw is quick and resourceful. How can I offer anything of value when compared to them?"

"It takes a long time to get where you wanna be by comparing your progress with others. When we we're kits, I often compared myself to Falconstrike. He was large and had broad shoulders, tough and always protecting me. I was the weaker kit, the one who couldn't keep up as well as his big brother. When we became apprentices and he grew close with Pinefur and Owlflame, I fully expected him to ignore me as the others did. But he spent every night sharing prey with me, and every few days he would sleep beside me in the medicine cat den. Siblings can never be broken, never truly hate each other. I'm sure you've heard of your mother's half-siblings, Mistyrain's mother?"

"Yeah. Skyfeather said her half-brother Troutfur died in the same battle that Hawkflight died in." Rainpaw nodded, recalling the heartbroken expression that had crossed her mother's delicate face. It had upset Rainpaw to see her normally strong mother look so tired and hurt.

"Troutfur and Hawkflight both died in that battle, but what was most horrific was they died in front of your mother and her half-sister, Mistyrain's mother Rosecloud. Both shecats were too late in saving their brothers, and although they both harbored a deep mistrust for each other due to the circumstances of Skyfeather and her littermate's birth, they both knew what it was like to loose a brother and not be able to stop it from happening." Ravensight explained. "Being siblings means you recognize each ltherNs strengths while supporting them. Falconstrike supports me in my path, and I his. Mistyrain and her brother, although in different clans, have a solid relationship. Honeypool and Bramblestorm both are close, but they are able to be individually excellent. Your littermates admire you as well, for your heart and loving spirit."

"Thank you Ravensight." Rainpaw meowed, her chin lifted as she perked up a bit, the black furred medicine cat letting out a raspy purr.

Feeling lighter than before, Rainpaw moved forward until she was walking beside Owlflame, her mentor giving her a teasing grin.

"How would you like me to teach you some battle moves when we stop to rest?" The speckled brown warrior offered, his yellow eyes gleaming.

"Okay!" Rainpaw chirped, her tail flicking as she looked at him brightly. She felt a tail touch her side, and glancing over her eyes connected with a pair of pale green ones. Bramblestorm's tabby pelt sleek as he kept pace with them.

"Mind if I join in? I could use some brushing up." He meowed, his eyes sliding past the apprentice to make contact with Owlflame who nodded.

"Course. You can help me train Rainpaw here." He grinned, his whiskers twitching in amusement as he added on, "she'll need all the help she can get."

"Oh hush!" Rainpaw laughed as she nudged her mentor, her eyes rolling. The speckled warrior laughed, his yellow eyes full of amusement as Bramblestorm joined in. Rainpaw felt a rush of affection for her mentor; appreciative of how kind he was and how patient.

"I think we should stop to hunt, give everyone a chance to take a breather." Mistyrain announced, her stormy fur smooth as she addressed the patrol. At her side, Pinefur and Stormpaw waited silently as the group came to a stop.

"Tigerfrost, Honeypool, Cinderpaw and Stormpaw, can you go hunt?" Pinefur spoke up, his deep voice rumbling as he addressed the younger warriors and apprentices.

With a nod of agreement, Tigerfrost turned, Rainpaw's silver furred sister at his side while Honeypool and Stormpaw trailed behind.

"Cmon Rainpaw, time to train a bit." Owlflame grinned as he nudge his apprentice, the long legged shecat purring as she turned to follow her mentor, aware of Bramblestorm's leafy gaze on her.

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The three came to a stop a bit further from from the group, pausing in a smaller clearing surrounding by pine and oak trees.

"This is where we'll start. Rainpaw, you have to learn how to find someone's talents and drawbacks. Their weaknesses and strengths. Take Bramblestorm, he's bulky wjth muscular shoulders, but when attacking, that muscle slows him down. As a cat who is more lean and thin, you're naturally quicker." Owlflame meowed, taking a seat in front of his apprentice, his eyes calm. "Bramblestorm, I want you to act on the defense. Rainpaw, face him. I want you to study his stance, the way he moves. Find a weakness and use it to win."

Rainpaw dipped her head before turning to face Bramblestorm. The spiky tabby tom stood confidently, his eyes gleaming with mischief as he watched her intently. Rainpaw continued to study him, noting the way his body seemed to lean slightly towards the left as he waited, and the way his left front paw was slightly crooked in it's stance.

At Owlflame's call for action, Rainpaw struck. Darting first to the right, then to the left, she was able to momentarily confuse the older warrior, scrambling to tap his left shoulder before starting back. She thought she was close, only to feel Bramblestorm nip at her tail.

"Good! Especially for a first try. You need to be quicker in your strikes, use your longer legs for an advantage." Owlflame praised, his tail curling. "You have exceptionally strong hind legs, use them for a leap maybe? For cats smaller in size like Cinderpaw, darting in and out comes easier since they're so small. But for long legged ones like you and I, we are better at leaps and swiftness. Use that."

Rainpaw nodded brightly, feeling more confident as her gaze turned to meet Bramblestorm's.

"He's right. Maybe try leaping over me instead?" The tabby warrior suggested quietly. "I barely caught you, but had you done a leap then rolled? I couldn't have touched you." His voice, low and gentle, rumbled as he voiced his thoughts. Bramblestorm returned to his

defensive stance, his tail lashing as he eyed her encouragingly.

Rainpaw sucked in a breath, her body shifting as she lunged at the warrior again. This time she feinted to the right before leaping out of the way, managing to tap his left shoulder before darting back, leaping up again as Bramblestorm aimed for her paws with a well timed strike.

"Good!" Owlflame called out, his yellow eyes full of pride as the two younger clan cats paused, both catching their breath. "Rainpaw, that was very good. Next time I'd be more mindful on how high you jump, you don't want to give your enemy an opening to attack your underbelly." He spoke, his ear twitching.

"Okay. Can we try it again?" Rainpaw meowed, her light gaze traveling from her mentor to the warrior at his side and back again. "Please?"

"I don't see why not." Owlflame meowed warmly, his head tilting. "Bramblestorm-"

He was cut off as the bushes rustled, causing Bramblestorm to step forward carefully, his bulky frame moving to stand in front of Rainpaw protectively.

"Who's there?" Owlflame demanded, his friendly features morphing into a look of sheer determination as he stepped even with Bramblestorm, his tail tip twitching back and forth.

The bushes rustled again before three cats emerged, the first being a lean, speckled shecat with a solid ginger tail, her blue eyes curious. Just behind her, a ginger and white shecat waited anxiously with worried amber eyes, a darker grey, almost black tom watching from her shoulder.

"Who are you?" Bramblestorm meowed gruffly, his claws unsheathing.

"Us? Who are you!" The grey tom retorted, his blue eyes narrowed distastefully as he shoved his way forward, only to duck his head slightly as the speckled shecat gave him a sharp glance.

"I am Owlflame, this is my clanmate Bramblestorm and my apprentice Rainpaw. We're from a group further away, called ThunderClan. Now, who are you?" Owlflame meowed, his voice steady and serious. He looked firm but kind, his yellow eyes traveling the pelts of the strange cats in front of them.

Upon closer inspection, Rainpaw noticed now worried the ginger and white shecat looked, her copper eyes full of fear and her pelt dull and ungroomed. As the speckled shecat took a seat with an almost silent huff, her front paw lifting as she did so. Rainpaw could see her paw pads were dark grey and hard, as if she was made to travel stones and rocks.

"I am Spots. This is Sorrel and Soot." The speckled shecat meowed, her tail gesturing to the ginger and white shecat first, then the dark pelted tom. Spots looked to be a bit older, her speckled tawny pelt more fluffy than her companions. Her most striking feature was her tail, the color a fiery ginger that seemed at odds with her otherwise gentle appearance.

Sorrel seemed to be more muscular, her hind legs strong and her body more compact. As she moved, Rainpaw could see her muscles rippling under her thin pelt, as well as the remnants of several scars along her shoulders. With a shiver, she dropped her gaze, glancing back up to meet eyes with the third cat that had been introduced.

Soot was lean, with a wiry, thin frame and dark fur. His eyes, at first blue, were darker upon closer inspection, and seemed cold and hard. He offered a slight smirk, his chin lifting suggestively as he eyed Rainpaw boldly, ignoring the warning growl Bramblestorm let out.

"...traveling to find the lost clan. Or so our medicine cat claims. He believes we will find the descendants of this SkyClan skmetime soon. They were said to be excellent jumpers, with the ability to live amongst mountains and rocky gorges." Owlflame finished explaining, his tail curled around his paws neatly.

"A lost clan? Seems a bit far-fetched. How do you know for sure they even exist?" Spots meowed, her head tilting curiously. Sorrel had sat beside her, her golden eyes full of curiosity.

Soot looked unconvinced, his eyes rolling at his companion's question. "Who cares? This clan of whatever is bound to be better than-"

"Soot, that's enough." Sorrel hissed, cutting the younger tom off quickly. She turned her gaze onto the clan cats., her voice softening. "I think we would like to be apart of this SkyClan , if you'll have us?"

"I-sure. You'll have to come along and meet the rest of the group first however." Owlflame meowed, rising to his paws. He was obviously excited, his eyes lighting up as he turned to face his clanmates. "Rainpaw, run ahead and inform the others. We'll be along."

"Okay Owlflame." Rainpaw meowed, standing up and nodding g before dashing off.

As she ran, she mulled over the events. She didn't know how to feel about the new additions, but she was excited to see SkyClan gain three new members, to see the first three members even.

She entered the clearing the clan cats had claimed as their camp, managing to stop quickly as the group faced her. She hardly noticed the old scruffy ginger tom, his blue eyes narrowed in irritation as a few bits of pine needle and leaves scattered across his pelt.

"Rainpaw? What's going on? Where's Owlflame and Bramblestorm?" Mistyrain meowed, stepping forward. Ravensight moved to stand beside her, the two sharing a look of concern.

Across the clearing, Honeypool, Pinefur and Stormpaw had been sharing a rabbit, the three pausing in their meal to survey the scene in front of them. Cinderpaw and Tigerfrost looked to have been talking, their heads bent together.

"Owlflame has three new members for SkyClab. He's bringing them here with Bramblestorm." Rainpaw explained, her ears pricked as she caught the sound of crunching leaves. Turning, she was met with Bramblestorm leading Soot, Sorrel and Spots into the clearing, Owlflame trialing behind them.

"Is this true Owlflame? These cats wish to join SkyClan ?" Ravensight meowed, taking charge of the situation as he moved forward. His pale green eyes swept the three newcomers, fixating on Spots intently for a few moments longer than the others.

"Yes. This is Spots, Sorrel and Soot. They wish to join SkyClan ." Owlflame meowed, his tail gesturing to each loner in turn. He nodded towards the elderly tomcat, his voice friendly. "And this is?"

"The name's Russet. I'm the last living descendent of SkyClan. That knows of our heritage, that is." The grizzled tom meowed gruffly, his voice raspy and hard as he stepped forward. His blue eyes narrowed as he inspected the three liners intensely, pausing as he looked at Spots. "You have the paws of a SkyClan cat, made for leaping and traveling rocky ledges."

He continued, pausing as he nodded towards Sorrel. "Your legs are strong, good for making large jumps and bringing down prey."

He finally turned to Soot, his whiskers twitching. "And young'un , you have the ambition of a SkyClan cat."

Turning to look at the clan cats, Russet nodded approvingly. "They'll be fine warriors of SkyClan. Now just to find more."

Ravensight chuckled softly as he moved forward. "A leader, deputy and medicine cat. Soon you'll be on your way to being a real clan."

chapter nine

Stormpaw frowned as he watched the newcomers warily, his golden eyes narrowed. Soot, his dark grey fur sleek and well maintained, sat next to Bramblestorm and Rainpaw. The grey rogue seemed a bit too interested in his sister; tossing the shy apprentice flirty looks and smiles as he joked. Bramblestorm seemed uneasy and irritated, his tabby tail curled around Rainpaw's frame protectively.

A few tailengths away, Spots and Sorrel spoke with Russet, Owlflame, Ravensight and Pinefur, the group's voices low.

Honeypool, Cinderpaw, Tigerfrost and Mistyrain had all left to hunt, promising to stay close to the make-shift camp. Cinderpaw had seemed slightly agitated when told Honeypool would be joining, a feeling apparently shared by the tabby shecat. Stormpaw couldn't help but find it amusing how much the two shecats seemed to dislike each other, and the rivalry seemed to fully be influenced by Tigerfrost. The dark tabby had no clue what he did when he paid so much of his attention to the silver furred apprentice, and Stormpaw couldn't help but find it funny that the tom was so clueless.

"Stormpaw, come with me." Pinefur meowed, padding towards his golden furred apprentice. At his side, Sorrel stood waiting, her ginger and white pelt as smooth as the fluffy furred shecat could have it. So far Stormpaw liked the older shecat, finding her quiet presence to be soothing.

"Sure. What are we doing?" Stormpaw meowed, his ear flicking curiously.

"I thought we would gather some moss. Ravensight would like to make camp here for the night, and I think the rest would be good for us. Russet mentioned that moss grows a lot towards the other side of the clearing." Pinefur explained, his whiskers twitching.

Sorrel nodded, her light amber eyes clear and friendly. "He is right.

I noticed an abundance of moss when we were traveling."

"Alright. Let's go." Pinefur meowed, gesturing for the two to follow him as he headed towards the tree line.

"Tell me, what is it like? Is Stormpaw your name for the rest of your life? I noticed there was Cinderpaw and Rainpaw, surely you all three won't be given that as names?" Sorrel meowed, her voice low and curious.

"Oh, no that's just what you are given as an apprentice. Kit names usually end in 'kit, while apprentices are ended with 'paw. When we become a warrior or a medicine cat, we get our full names. Rainpaw and Cinderpaw are my sisters, although Cinderpaw wants a name similar to our father, Thistlefang." Stormpaw explained, his eyes rolling at the mention of his more spirited sibling.

"Cinderpaw seems to be more...energetic. Rainpaw seems to be very kind." Sorrel meowed.

"Yeah, Cinderpaw has always been the loud one of us three, she's always been the one to dive headfirst and think later. Rainpaw is the kind one. I worry about her the most, she's so gentle that I get concerned she may be hurt." Stormpaw admitted, his body tensing at the thought. He didn't know why, but Sorrel seemed to be someone he felt more comfortable with.

"I had a sister once, her name was Poppy. I always thought she was too kind for the harsh world of a loner, and she was. But she was also incredibly brave. She died saving me and Spots from a fox. Don't underestimate Rainpaw, I'm sure she can handle herself just fine." Sorrel advised, her voice gentle and kind.

"In a clan we take care of each other. No one ever fights alone." Pinefur meowed. "Some warriors get apprentices to teach, queens are protected alongside their kits, and elders are respected and cared for."

"Clan life sounds like a luxury. I'm sure I'll like it." Sorrel meowed, her voice determined and sure.

"It's not always easy. The warrior code teaches all that before any warrior is allowed to eat, elders, queens and kits are fed first, for they are the past and future of every clan. The clan leader gets nine lives, the medicine cat communicates with StarClan." Pinefur smiled as he glanced over his shoulder at them, his tail flicking. "But one of our the rules that is very important is to never take a mate from Outside your own clan. It can cause heartbreak and a war if handled incorrectly. Medicine cats are also unable to take a mate."

"I see. That must be difficult, tk care for your clanmates and not have a cat you love for yourself." Sorrel meowed lowly, her head shaking.

"Alright, let's split up, cover more ground. Stormpaw, you head towards the west, I'll take this side and Sorrel can take the other." Pinefur instructed, fixing his gaze on his apprentice. "Stormpaw I want you to try to bring back four pieces of prey if you can. If you cannot, then that's alright as long as you try your best."

"Of course Pinefur." Stormpaw promised, determination rising its head as he turned. Loping over into the denser part of the forest, Stormpaw immediately began scenting the air, the scent of fresh moss, trees and the earthy scent of the forest floor hitting his senses. He caught the trace of a mouse, and beginning to track it down.

Creeping forward, Stormpaw smirked as the scent of the mouse began to increase in its intensity. As he slunk through the undergrowth, he was thankful for his golden pelt blending in; the bulky apprentice couldn't imagine being stuck with the same silvery pelt as his sister's, which seemed to shine though the darkest night like a star, or the white patched pelt of Sorrel. '*She must be pretty good at hunting, especially in these woods.*'

He was torn from his thoughts at the sound of a few leaves rustling, and waiting with baited breath he watched as a mouse scurried in front of him. The tiny creature didn't seem to notice how close danger was, it's focus on a small beech nut as the tawny tabby apprentice crouched, his legs gathering beneath him as he prepared to spring.

With a silent hiss, he pounced, landing squarely on the piece of prey

as he nipped it's spine, killing it quickly. With a shake of his pelt, Stormpaw sat up with the piece of prey in his mouth, digging a shallow dip in the earth before dropping the mouse inside and scraping dirt on top of it. His tail sweeping, the golden furred apprentice immediately began to look for more prey, his movements smooth as he crept further into the surrounding forest.

It wasn't very long before he had caught a squirrel, pouncing and killing the creature quickly. Burying his prey, he set off to find his last piece, eager to show off to Pinefur his progress in hunting.

He crept along, his paws light as he searched for any scent of another creature. He paused, catching sight of Sorrel's tabby and white pelt a few fox lengths ahead. The older shecat crouched low, her tail still as she waited. As Stormpaw peered further, he watched with amazement as the tabby and white shecat shot forward, chasing a bulky squirrel up the tree. The shecat's muscular hind legs worked as a propellant, launching the shecat further up the tree than any cat he had ever met as she caught the prey.

Dropping down to the ground, Sorrel's tail lashing in triumph as she held the prey in her jaws, her eyes bright. Stormpaw stepped forward, his tail lashing as he moved.

"That was amazing!" He spoke, startling the shecat as she whipped her head to look at him. "Have you always been able to do that?"

"Oh, Stormpaw you startled me!" She chuckled as she set the squirrel down before nodding. "Yes, ever since I was a kit. I've always been good at leaping and climbing, maybe that's a trait from SkyClan ?" She meowed hopefully, looking pleased as Stormpaw nodded furiously.

"SkyClan was said to be able to leap higher than any cat, and if that's true then you're definitely a descendant!" Stormpaw assured her, his tail flicking. He was pleased to see his words had reassured the older cat.

"Thanks Stormpaw. We should gather out prey and meet with Pinefur." Sorrel meowed, her whiskers twitching happily as she picked up her squirrel.

"I'll meet you there." He spoke, turning and retrieving the mouse and squirrel. By the time the golden apprentice had gathered his catches, Sorrel and Pinefur waited in the clearing they had split up in. Pinefur had a large rabbit in front of his paws, along with a shrew. Sorrel had caught a squirrel and a small vole.

"Two catches? Very good." Pinefur meowed proudly, his eyes gleaming at the sight of his apprentice. "You're shaping up to be a wonderful hunter, just like your mother."

Hearing his mentor compare his skill to Skyfeather's made Stormpaw perk up, his pelt warm. He loves the idea that he was almost as skilled as his mother, having always thought the silver shecat was such an amazing warrior.

"Let's get back to camp."

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As the hunting patrol made it back to the makeshift camp, they were met with Russet and the others arguing, pelts bristling and tails lashing.

"...mouse-brain! We travel further in, Ravensight and Rainpaw both have seen signs from StarClan that SkyClan 'a home is close!" Mistyrain hissed furiously, her normally easygoing manner gone as the grey shecat glared at Russet angrily.

"How are we to know if we can even believe them?" Spots cut in, her pelt prickling as she moved to stand by Russet's shoulder, the elderly tom giving her a swift glance of appreciation.

"Are you implying my apprentice is a liar?" Owlflame growled, his yellow eyes furious as he took a stiff-legged step closer.

""I'm just saying-"

"What is going on here?" Pinefur interrupted, setting his prey down.

"Ravensight and Rainpaw believe that we need to travel further towards the mountains to find more SkyClan cats." Honeypool spoke up, her tail flicking. "And Russet thinks we should stay here."

"The prey grows richer towards the mountains, and fresh water is easier to find. If I were a rogue or loner, I'd be wanting to get as close to good sources of food and water as possible." Pinefur reasoned, turning his gaze onto the SkyClan cats. "Russet, is there another reason for not wanting to get closer?"

"No! But those mountains are dangerous enough without us traipsing all over them looking for what is under our noses." Russet grumbled, seeming to calm down a bit as he listened. "Even housecats could want to join."

His words were met with little to no resistance, Mistyrain's pelt beginning to smooth as she calmed down. Stormpaw watched as the group began to calm, voices low as they spoke.

"It's not a bad idea." Bramblestorm spoke up, Stormpaw's ears flicking back as the brown tabby stepped forward. Rainpaw, who had been sitting next to the young warrior, looked on in interest as the normally brooding tom spoke. "If SkyClan cats descended into rogues and loners, who's to say they haven't had some family as kittypets? Or even some in other clans?" He shrugged. "I could bet some of the other cats in the clans are descended from the old SkyClan cats. Like Sparrowstrike and his kits, they all have muscular hind legs. And so does Thistlefang, Stormpaw, even Lionkit and Hawkkit. Maybe some of SkyClan 'a members will come from our own clans?"

"That could be true," Owlflame meowed, his yellow eyes serious as he looked around them. "I know Ashpaw of RiverClan has a very muscular build, especially in her legs. And her paw pads are the same as Russet and Sorrel's. Maybe we find some more members on our journey, and the rest will step forward?"

"There's only one way to fully know for sure. We each will need to find at least one new member for SkyClan. Whether that be a loner, rogue or a kittypet." Pinefur meowed, his eyes turning to look at Russet. "I promise you Russet, we will help rebuild this clan and bring you home."

Russet looked speechless, his red tabby fur fluffing up as he shuffled his paws. Choking back a sigh, the tom sucked in a breath before

looking at them with gratitude filled eyes. "I know. I trust you all."

chapter ten

"What was that? You couldn't even manage to speak up for your clanmates against that flea-bitten loner?" Duskheart hissed furiously.

"He's practically an elder, and the warrior code says he deserves respect. And Mistyrain is capable of defending herself." Cinderpaw snapped back, her tail lashing. She ducked as Duskheart swiped one of his massive paws towards her ears, hissing in pain as his claws caught on her ear. She crouched as Duskheart towered over her furiously, his hazel eyes narrowed.

"SkyClan cannot l be led to believe that the clans don't protect their own. Already the new recruits can see the tension. Honeypool and you can't stand to breathe the same air, Rainpaw and Bramblestorm draw back further from the rest, and Stormpaw seems to believe in SkyClan more than his own clan!" His words were harsh and mean, his eyes narrowed.

"No! Stormpaw is loyal, he's just being friendly. And Honeypool, who cares about her opinion? She's just jealous that me and Tigerfrost get along so well." Cinderpaw scoffed.

"You care! If you ever wish to become a warrior, or even leader, you must show your care for your clanmates. Do you think I liked everyone i knew? I did not. But I respected them and kept my thoughts to myself." Duskheart scolded, his tail lashing furiously. "If you don't show better leadership, you'll be passed over in favor of someone else. With your clan, your friends, Tigerfrost."

Cinderpaw hissed as she lunged, her smaller form crashing into Duskheart's body as she clawed at him. "I won't be passed over!" She declared as she continued to attack. The past training bouts had made her progress in fighting advance further and further. Now, she was more lean, her small body packed with muscle.

Duskheart fought back, the two tussling before breaking apart. "That's more like it!" He growled. "Be better than the others, or cats like Honeypool will take what belongs to you. Do you want to watch her and

Tigerfrost fall in love? Have kits?"

"Never." Cinderpaw declared, white-hot rage flowing through her at the thought of the smug brown tabby shecat getting so close with the dark tom Cinderpaw found herself thinking about. With a hiss, the silver apprentice knocked the shadowy tom in front of her over, her paw pressing into his throat as she slowly began to unsheathe them, revealing in the power she felt.

"Good. Show me that you are worthy of my training." Duskheart growled as he pushed her off of him, sitting up and shaking his pelt out. "Groom your pelt, I have someone who wishes to meet you."

Cinderpaw perked up, hurriedly grooming herself as she waited for this new visitor to appear.

"Cherryfang, I'm glad to see you arrived. This is my apprentice, Cinderpaw. Cinderpaw, meet Cherryfang and her apprentice." Duskheart meowed, his voice sly as he watched his apprentice turn to face the new cats.

Cherryfang was one of the largest shecats that Cinderpaw had ever seen, with dark ginger fur, cold blue eyes and so many scars it was hard to see where one ended and the other began. Feeling her heart give a skip in fear, Cinderpaw steeled herself, her chin lifted loftily as she gave a small nod to the shadowy cat.

"Cinderpaw, I'm sure you know Bramblestorm." Cherryfang meowed, her voice so cold and dark that it made an involuntary shiver run down Cinderpaw's back.

"Bramblestorm?" Cinderpaw spoke, her eyes wide as she looked at the cat that trailed a few tail lengths after Cherryfang. It was indeed her clanmate; the brown tom's spiky fur looked even more wild, his pale green eyes wide with shock as he looked at her. She took a small step back at the thought that the already bad tempered tomcat was training with a mentor in his dreams, and judging by the state of his pelt and the scratches scattered across his shoulders, Cinderpaw knew he was trained just as hard if not more so. 'And he spends so much time with Rainpaw..' she thought, her eyes narrowing at the thought of her gentle hearted sister being near the tom.

"It's almost dawn. Be prepared, you two will be sparring against each other fairly soon." Duskheart cut in, sharing an amused look with Cherryfang. The dark ginger shecat looked pleased, her cold eyes string at the two clan cats as they faded from the clearing.

Cinderpaw sat up quickly as her dreams faded, her head twisting to look around her. A tail length away she could see Rainpaw curled up in a ball, a mass of spiky brown tabby fur curled up next to her. As she watched, Bramblestorm sat up, his pale green eyes meeting hers from his position. With a slight nod, he curled back up, his eyes closing.

Honeypool slept soundly beside her brother, the two tabbies breathing in sync. Across from them, Stormpaw laid on his back, his mouth open as he snorted quietly. Just beyond, Cinderpaw could see the rest of their companions curled up in various states.

With a sigh, the silver tabby got up, her ear flicking as she stretched before she made her way out of the clearing.
It wasn't long before she reached the stream that seemed to follow them whenever they turned, and with a slight wince at the ache in her muscles, Cinderpaw sat down at the edge, her eyes staring into the water as she watched her reflection.

It seemed like she hadn't seen herself in a while, and she was shocked to see the subtle changes that seemed to make up a new cat altogether. She was still shorter than her littermates, with the same copper eyes and silver tabby fur, but she had collected faint scratches along her shoulder, a little Knick in her left ear. Her copper eyes looked more determined and hard then she remembered, and with a shudder she noticed the way her eyes seemed to stay narrowed, almost mimicking the expression Duskheart wore when he was calculating something. '*It's like you're slowly adopting his mannerisms.'*

Her head turned as a twig snapped, and tensing up, she unsheathed her claws as she waited. Cinderpaw let out a sigh of relief as Tigerfrost's dark head pushed through the bushes, his dark blue eyes glittering in the dim light. "Oh, it's you."

"You alright?" Tigerfrost meowed, pausing as he approached her.

From how the tom's voice was clear and free of any sign of sleep, Cinderpaw guessed he helped keep watch over the group.

"Yeah. Just a strange dream. Figured I should get something to drink." Cinderpaw meowed, turning back and sitting down. She glanced at the tom, watching as he nodded before sitting next to her. Glancing back at the water, she watched their reflections thoughtfully.

Tigerfrost had always been large, with broad shoulders and long legs. As a lot, she could remember a time when Tigerfrost, Bramblestorm and Honeypool had been in the nursery, along with Ashwind, Thornheart and Sparkfire. She had always liked playing with the older kits, striving to be as fast and faster if possible. Honeypool had spent their days in the nursery together chasing after Tigerfrost and Bramblestorm, and Cinderpaw had done the same.

But where Ashwind and Cinderpaw had found themselves in a brother-sister like relationship, Bramblestorm and Tigerfrost had done the same. As a lone kit, Tigerfrost had often spent all his time with the spiky furred tomcat and his sister, causing the three to be made apprentices together.

"You know, I remember when we were in the nursery together. I remember when you snuck a thorn into Honeypool's side of the nest because she called you a mouse." Tigerfrost broke the silence, his dark navy gaze full of amusement. "Even back then you were causing trouble."

"She shouldn't have called me a mouse and Rainpaw a flea." Cinderpaw shrugged, smiling as Tigerfrost laughed. Glancing away from the water, she was met with the dark tabby's head shaking as he relaxed further.

"No, you and Stormpaw made sure to get anyone who upset Rainpaw. We all thought it was the funniest thing when you would go after someone for insulting Rainpaw as a kit." Tigerfrost chuckled, his head shaking. "Bramblestorm hated watching her get upset too, he used to try and claw anyone who made any comments about her."

"He really does care for her doesn't he? In his own way?" Cinderpaw sobered slightly at the mention of the tom. As much as she disliked him, she couldn't deny liking the fact that the tom was so protective over Rainpaw.

"Yes. I think he's always thought she was amazing. He told me last night that he's helping her train more so that way she doesn't feel as behind as she does." Tigerfrost meowed.

"Rainpaw feels like she's behind? But she's a wonderful tracker, even Owlflame says so. And she's been visited by StarClan, so she must be special too." Cinderpaw spoke, her head turning sharply. She couldn't see why Rainpaw didn't understand how incredible she was; the blue-grey shecat was swift, with a kind heart and a way of putting others at ease.

"Sometimes littermates feel as if they constantly have to compete with each other. I know that even though Bramblestorm and Honeypool aren't truly my siblings, that we all are competitive with each other. I'm a fairly good hunter, Honeypool is very quick when it comes to running and climbing, and Bramblestorm is a phenomenal fighter." The dark tabby shrugged as he snorted, his whiskers twitching. "Although Bramblestorm can't seem to climb anything some days."

"Stormpaw is going to be amazing at hunting. He hears prey quicker than I can, and he's so quick to catch it. Rainpaw is so kind, and I've seen her track things. I think they're both amazing." Cinderpaw meowed, a pure rumbling at the mention of her littermates' skills.

"From what Mistyrain says, you're shaping up to be an exceptional fighter. She thinks you're gonna be better than Thistlefang even at the rate you're going." Tigerfrost meowed, his head tilting. "Every cat has something that comes easier to them than others."

"Yeah. Wanna go hunting with me?" She offered, her eyes meeting his.

Tigerfrost grinned, his dark eyes softening as he nodded. "Of course. First one to catch three pieces of prey is the next deputy." He teased, his whiskers twitching at the mention of their previous

discussion.

"Oh you're on."

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By the time the two had returned to the clearing, the others had begun to wake up more. Bramblestorm and Soot sat by Rainpaw, the three talking as Rainpaw groomed herself.

With a slight bit of shock, Cinderpaw studied her sister intently. She began to notice little differences, like the way Rainpaw's fur seemed more sleek, and how her thin frame looked less awkward and more graceful as she moved. What seemed the most evident, was how relaxed and confident the shecat looked as she spoke to Bramblestorm, the spiky furred warrior grinning as he teased the apprentice gently.

Soot looked bored, his dark pelt clean and recently groomed. He soon stood up, meowing something to Bramblestorm and Rainpaw before turning and walking to where Honeypool and Stormpaw sat sharing a rabbit.

'*Stormpaw looks different too*.' Cinderpaw thought, pausing as she followed after Tigerfrost to lay down their catches. The golden furred tom looked stronger, his pelt darkening to the color of autumn leaves as he laughed with Honeypool and Soot.

"Looks like you two caught some good prey." Mistyrain's voice cut in, taking Cinderpaw's attention. Looking towards her mentor, Cinderpaw set down the rather plump rabbit she had caught, feeling a wave of warmth and pride wash over her at the approving tone in the warrior's voice.

"We did. Cinderpaw here caught the rabbit and the shrew." Tigerfrost meowed, his tail flicking to gesture to the two pieces of prey.

"Good. Tigerfrost, can you take that rabbit to Russet and Ravensight? Cinderpaw and I are going to go train for a bit, brush up on her battle skills". Mistyrain requested, letting out a faint grin

as Tigerfrost nodded.

"Really?" Cinderpaw beamed, her tail lashing in excitement. She would finally get to show her mentor her new progress!

"Yes. You, Rainpaw and Stormpaw are gonna train together today, it's about time we try a normal training bout." Owlflame meowed as he approached, Rainpaw following.

"We can bring Spots, Sorrel and Soot too, so they can see how we train apprentices?" Mistyrain suggested, looking pleased as Owlflame nodded.

"Sure. I'll see if they want to come along. I'll also get Pinefur and Stormpaw." Owlflame meowed, his eyes rolling at the mention of his brother and the apprentice.

"Good luck, Stormpaw hates being rushed when he's eating." Rainpaw grinned, purring as Owlflame nudged her shoulder. The two were both tall, and the blue-grey shecat stood at his shoulder already.

Cinderpaw grinned, excited to show off her newly acquired skills.

chapter eleven

Rainpaw purred as she followed after her sister, her and Stormpaw sharing an amused look as they watched Cinderpaw practically prance ahead

"Come *on*!" The silver apprentice meowed, her excitement clear as she turned to look at them. Rainpaw grinned as she caught up, her longer legs allowing her to keep stride with her sister easily.

"Alright apprentices, today we start battle training for you and for our new companions. We train with our claws sheathed to avoid hurting each other, and we make sure to keep ourselves safe as well." Pinefur meowed, facing the apprentices as they stopped in a large sandy clearing.

"With that being said, I think today we'll try tackling the leap-and-hold, see if you can manage it." Owlflame meowed, his eyes narrowed as he observed the three apprentices.

Sorrel, Spots and Soot sat behind them, their eyes full of curiosity and wonder as they watched the training.

"Cinderpaw, you stand here. Stormpaw, across from her. Now Cinderpaw, I want you to be prepared to leap high. Stormpaw will charge towards you, and you'll need to get over him, twist and hold him down." Mistyrain instructed, her ears flicking.

Stormpaw nodded, crouching as he got ready.

Rainpaw took a seat, watching her siblings. As she did, she found her focus fixed on Cinderpaw, watching as her sister seemed to take a deep breath, her features becoming more determined as she crouched, her tail tucked closer to her body. As Stormpaw lunged, Cinderpaw leapt up, her tail lashing to help with the momentum as she twisted in the air, landing precisely down onto Stormpaw's shoulders. The silver shecat's paws hooked around her brother's neck, and dragging him down onto his side, Cinderpaw kept him

pinned.

"Woah, that was incredible!" Mistyrain meowed, stepping forward as the two apprentices broke apart. "Cinderpaw, that was very very well executed."

Her praise seemed to bring Cinderpaw out of her daze, the apprentice beaming as her mentor praised her.

"I like that you tucked in your tail until you leapt, it added a bit of force to your leap. I want you two to switch, Stormpaw try it like that." Pinefur meowed, his voice approving as he nodded to his apprentice.

Rainpaw grinned, pride over her sister filling up her chest as she kneaded the ground in excitement. She marveled at the sight of her siblings sparring, both quick as they moved.

"Good! Rainpaw, you and Cinderpaw are next." Owlflame called, gesturing the shecat to step forward. As she did, he brushed his tail along her spine, his eyes gentle. "Remember, you have long legs, use them." He advised softly as she nodded.

Rainpaw crouched down, her eyes locked with Cinderpaw's. The shecat looked determined, her copper eyes shining as she shifted her weight slightly before lunging.

Rainpaw waited until she was sure Cinderpaw was close enough, using her hind legs to kick up. Once she was in the air, Rainpaw twisted her body, feeling her front paws land on her sister's shoulders as she did so.

Cinderpaw let out a breath as she was pressed to the earth, her tail flicking as Rainpaw purred. "Yeah yeah, I get it." Cinderpaw rolled her eyes playfully.

"That was good! Next time Cinderpaw try to keep your paws more balanced. Rainpaw, your tail wasn't as tucked in as it could've been. Keep working on it." Mistyrain advised, smiling at the apprentices. "But a very good start!"

"Could I try?" Sorrel meowed, stepping forward. She looked excited,

her eyes bright as she looked at the ThunderClan cats.

"Of course. Stormpaw? You and Sorrel pair up, Soot and Rainpaw, Spots and Cinderpaw. We'll help you when needed. Apprentices, on the defense first." Owlflame meowed warmly, gesturing for the pairs to break off to practice.

Soot padded towards Rainpaw, his jaws opened in a friendly grin. "Surprised to see you without your shadow." His voice was low and teasing as he faced her directly, his tail tip twitching back and forth.

"Who? Bramblestorm?" Rainpaw meowed, her head tilting. "He's my friend, we're close."

"The last time I seen a tom that protective over a shecat, they were a lot more than close friends." Soot meowed, his whiskers twitching before he crouched. "Ready?"

"Yeah." Rainpaw meowed, crouching as well before she lunged. Charging towards the grey tom, she was pleasantly surprised to see him jump a heartbeat too soon, allowing her to hook his hind leg and bring him to the earth.

"Just a bit too early Soot. Next time, I suggest waiting till she's a whisker away." Owlflame called, his voice encouraging. "But very good on the jump!"

Soot nodded firmly as he faced her again. "He seems to be a good mentor."

"Owlflame? He's great. He always seems to be able to help me when I need it the most." Rainpaw meowed, affection for her mentor bubbling into her chest. She shook her head, her eyes narrowing in concentration as she prepares to lunge again.

Both her and Soot turned their head at the sound of a sharp yelp. As Rainpaw straightened out of her crouch, she watched as Cinderpaw jerked away from Spots, her eyes wide with shock as she scrambled back. Mistyrain crouched near the older shecat, her voice soft as she conversed. As Spots stood up, Rainpaw winced at the sight of the

jagged claw mark on her shoulders.

"Cinderpaw, we do not train wjth claws unsheathed. Be more careful." Mistyrain spoke, her voice gentle but firm as she turned her copper gaze onto her apprentice, the silver tabby looking ashamed and worried.

"I'm sorry Spots, I must've gotten carried away and-" Cinderpaw rushed out, her body stiff. Rainpaw felt a rush of sympathy for her sister; despite her stubbornness and blunt attitude, Cinderpaw was truly a kind shecat.

"No worries." Spots interrupted, stepping forward to give Cinderpaw an easygoing grin. "Remind me to always keep on your hood side though. You're quick!"

Cinderpaw relaxed, letting out a chuckle as she nodded. "You got it."

Spots turned to face the rest of the group, her tail waving hood naturedly.
"I'm fine! Cinderpaw just showed me how fierce a ThunderClan cat she can be." The shecat grinned, her eyes full of humor. "Let's see if you can get me again."

Wjth her words everyone returned to training, Rainpaw smiling as she watched Cinderpaw grin.

Turning back towards Soot, she crouched lower, lunging at him for the second time. This time, the dark tom leapt up as she reached him, his legs stretching. As he leapt, she was aware of him twisting to land on her shoulders. With a slight grin, the blue-grey shecat twisted out of his way, laughing as he landed with a grunt.
"Missed me!"

"Oh you cheeky kit!" Soot laughed as he lunged, the two play-fighting before he pinned her.

"Alright you two, let's get back to camp, I think Ravensight and Russet had a special meeting planned." Owlflame called, his whiskers twitching.

The group soon made their way back to camp, Cinderpaw, Mistyrain and Spots speaking animatedly as they walked ahead. Rainpaw kept in step with Stormpaw, the two bringing up the rear as they followed along. "Cinderpaw was incredible."

"I know. She picked it up so easily, like she's done it before." Stormpaw meowed, his head shaking. "She's always been better at things like that."

"And you've always been better at hunting." Rainpaw spoke, smiling as she nudged his shoulder affectionately. Stormpaw let out a laugh, nudging her back as they continued to follow along.

As they re-entered the small camp, Rainpaw grinned at the sight of Bramblestorm walking her way, the large warrior grinning in response.

"Hey, what's going on?" She meowed, pausing as the two met.

"Ravensight and Russet want to give the SkyClan cats their names. Honeypool, Tigerfrost and I found a few more members." Bramblestorm turned his head, nodding to where a few more cats sat.

Among them was a lean ginger shecat, her paws kneading the ground as she spoke with a large black and white tom, a grey-brown shecat. Crouched in front of the shecat sat two sandy colored tomkits, one of which was batting playfully at a white shecat's tail, a grey tom laughing beside her.

"Who are they?" Rainpaw meowed, following the tom to sit a couple fox lengths away.

"The light ginger shecat is named Sand, the black and white tom is a former barn cat named Nettle, the other shecat is Bird and her kits Twig and Daisy. Then the white shecat and grey tom is Sage and Mouse." Bramblestorm meowed. "And the light brown tabby shecat is Bella, Ravensight thinks she may be SkyClan 's new medicine cat."

"SkyClan and ThunderClan, today I have asked for you all to gather and witness the naming of the new clan warriors and apprentices."

Ravensight called, stepping forward as the gathered cats silenced.

"Ravensight has agreed to help in naming warriors and giving roles, as well as helping our new medicine cat in her role." Russet meowed, stepping forward as he looked around.

The cats all murmured their agreements and chattered idly, quieting down as they waited.

"SkyClan was once lost, and has been found. In this manner, many of its descendants have been found. I have been visited several times by StarClan, and in the most recent one they have shown to me that the next leader will be a cat who truly loves all and protects all. Your ancestors have chosen Spots to become your leader. Spots, from this day until you become a true leader, you will be known as Spottedtail." Ravensight meowed, his eyes fixed on the shecat as she looked around in shock.

"I-I never expected...what if I'm not a good leader?" Spottedtail meowed, her eyes wide.

"You kidding? You'll be incredible." Soot called, his voice confident.

"Okay. Thank you." Spottedtail meowed as she sat down.

"But, no leader or deputy may become so until they've mentored at least one kit. Sand, Leaf, you two will become SkyClan 's first two apprentices. From this day until you become warriors, you'll be known as Sandpaw and Leafpaw. Spottedtail, you will mentor Leafpaw and pass along the skills you have clearly shown. Spottedtail, it's up to you now as leader to name your deputy, and your clanmates." Ravensight meowed, gesturing for the shecat to step forward.

"Oh, I don't know what to say or how-" Spottedtail began, her eyes full of worry.

"We'll help you." Ravensight assured her.

The speckled shecat stepped up, her eyes full of concern. "Hello, I hope all of you know that I will do my best to be a leader you are proud of. But I must name my deputy." She leaned over, listening as

Ravensight spoke. "I say this in front of our ancestors and our clanmates, in hope you will all approve this choice. Sorrel, you've been my loyal friend for our whole lives. I can't imagine anyone else as my deputy. From this day on, you will be known as Sorrelspots. And I appoint you as mentor to Sandpaw. I know you'll train her into a wonderful warrior."

The clans cheered, Rainpaw smiling as she and Bramblestorm watched.

"Spottedtail, can I speak?" The grey-brown shecat called as the cats quieted down. "My name is Bird, and I came here today to see if this clan was truly all that it could be. We don't know each other, but I do know that my kits need a home, they need a clan, a family, to love them and help them grow. I think SkyClan will flourish into a wonderful clan, and I know we will wjth you as our leader."

"Bird." Spottedtail meowed as she walked closer, her voice gentle. "You and I know nothing of each other. But those words give me hope that this clan will work. I now give you your warrior name. Bird, you will be called Birdheart, and your kits?"

"Twig and Daisy." Birdheart meowed, her voice gentle. "They're three moons old."

"Twigkit and Daisykit will be the first kits of SkyClan ." Spottedtail promised, turning to face the rest of the cats gathered. "I swear I'll be a leader you all can be proud of."

By the end of the meeting, Soot, Nettle, Sage and Mouse had all been named Sootwhisker, Nettlefang, Mousepaw, and Sagepaw, with Nettlefang mentoring Sagepaw and Sootwhisker mentoring Mousepaw. What had been another big thing for the new clan had been Bella, the former kitty pet, being named Moonflower as the new medicine cat.

"Hey, just think, when we get home, you'll be made a warrior." Bramblestorm purred as he nudged Rainpaw, the blueish shecat laughing in response.

"I can't wait."

chapter twelve

Stormpaw snorted as he watched Honeypool roll her eyes for the fifth time.

The brown tabby shecat was clearly annoyed as she listened to the new SkyClan apprentices talk, the majority of the chatter coming from Sandpaw.
The golden colored shecat seemed to be full of life, her green eyes full of excitement as she continued to chatter along excitedly, Sorrelstripe chuckling as she walked ahead with Pinefur.

"Do you ever shut up?" Honeypool grumbled quietly, her eyes narrowed.
Stormpaw frowned slightly as he watched Sandpaw flinch, the ginger shecat shaking her head as she continued on.

"I'm excited! My first patrol as an apprentice, oh of my mother could see me." Sandpaw grinned as she kept her chin lifted proudly.

"What was she like? Your mother?" Stormpaw meowed, his ear flicking.

"Her name was Feather, and she was the kindest shecat I've ever met." Sandpaw meowed, seeming to calm down a little. "She was killed by a fox when I was seven moons old."

"How did you survive? In clan life, that's barely a moon into our apprenticeship."

"I got lucky I guess. I met Bird, and she was kind enough to let me stay in her barn with her and her mate before he died." Sandpaw spoke, her light eyes soft at the mention of the SkyClan queen.

"She seems really kind." Stormpaw meowed, his voice low. He watched the rest of the patrol continue walking, their paw steps even as they did.

"She is. But I'm excited to be apart of SkyClan." Sandpaw meowed. "And Sorrelstripe has been very nice so far."

"She seems like a very fair mentor. I think you'll enjoy training with her." Stormpaw meowed, his ears pricked as he glanced at the SkyClan apprentice.

Sandpaw didn't respond, only offering a small nod as the patrol began to slow.

"Alright, Stormpaw, why don't you head off that way? Try to bring back three pieces of prey if you can." Pinefur instructed, his eyes fixated on his apprentice. "I'll head this way. I'll see you all back when you finish."

Stormpaw set off, not looking back as Honeypool, Sorrelstripe and Sandpaw debated where they would towards. As he crept through the trees, he paused. Stormpaw looked up at the trees above, his eyes staring at the leaves that were slowly loosing color.

'*It'll be leaf-fall soon. I hope we've returned home by then.*.' he thought, his tail flicking. Stormpaw missed ThunderClan, missed his parents, his friends. '*I bet Lionpaw and Hawkpaw are advancing in their training, same with Breezepaw.*'

He shook his head, returning back to his earlier task as his jaws opened to scent for prey. His mouth began to water a bit as the scent of a mouse rose, Stormpaw dropping into a hunting crouch as he crept closer to the scent of the unsuspecting prey.

He almost let out a sigh of contentment as he caught sight of the small grey-brown creature nibbling on a seed a few tail lengths away from him. Keeping his hazel-gold eyes fixed on the mouse, Stormpaw slowly began to stalk closer, his paw steps light.

He waited until he was so close he could practically see the mouse's nose twitch, his eyes narrowed in concentration. As his hind legs gathered, he prepared to strike, pouncing at the creature.

He struck his mark, killing it quickly as he did so. With a faint hum of approval, the golden furred apprentice sat up, his tail flicking

proudly as he scraped a bit of dirt away, dropping the prey in before loosely burying it.

"That was amazing!" Sandpaw spoke, breaking through the tree line excitedly. With a faint sigh, Stormpaw turned to face her, his pelt laying flat as he watched her walk closer.

"Shouldn't you be with Sorrelstripe?" He questioned the apprentice, his whiskers twitching as she shrugged.

"She said to go hunt and bring back two pieces of prey. I already caught a robin." Sandpaw shrugged, her voice careless and dismissive. "Besides, maybe we could get better luck hunting together?"

"Maybe." Stormpaw relented, cracking a small grin at the ginger shecat's enthusiasm. "Come along then, let's see if we can find anything:"

Sandpaw perked up, her tail sticking in the air as she trotted after him as he turned.

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By the time the two of them had managed to make it back to the clearing, they had a sizable amount of prey between them. Sandpaw had caught a robin and two mice, and Stormpaw had his mouse and two squirrels.

"Good job, both of you!" Sorrelstripe purred as she watched them set their catches down. At her paws lay a rather plump rabbit and a sparrow. Pinefur nodded approvingly from his position by the tawny shecat, his three mice gathered between his paws.

"We're just waiting on Honeypool now." Pinefur meowed. "But very good job, both of you. At this rate, it'll be time for your assessment Stormpaw."

Stormpaw grinned, feeling his chest puff up in pride. With a slight grunt, he turned his head at the jab to his ribs to see Sandpaw grinning innocently at him, her green eyes full of humor.

"I'm here." Honeypool called, reappearing as she dragged a large rabbit behind her.

"That's big enough to feed Birdheart and her kits, maybe even Russet too." Sorrelstripe meowed. "Good job Honeypool."

Honeypool grinned, her eyes full of pride. "Thanks!"

"Let's get back to camp, we'll need the rest. I think Ravensight and Russet wanted us to begin our journey back to the lake tonight.'"Pinefur sighed.

The patrol gathered their prey before heading back, trading jokes and laughter as they went.

The hunting patrol was met with warm meows and excitement, Nettlefang and Sootwhisker rushing over to help set the prey down. Stormpaw found himself purring in approval as he watched Sandpaw take her robin to Russet, the old ginger tomcat giving her a gentle nudge.

"Hey, wanna share?" Cinderpaw's voice broke through StormpawNs thoughts, the golden apprentice turning his head to see his silver tabby sister nodding towards one of his squirrels.

"Sure. Where's Rainpaw?" Stormpaw meowed, his head tilting as he looked to locate his other sibling.

"Sharing prey with Bramblestorm." Cinderpaw muttered, her voice growing a bit bitter at the mention of the young tom.

"You don't trust him either, do you?" Stormpaw meowed, settling down to sit beside Cinderpaw as she took a bite of the prey.

"No. He's not good enough for her." Cinderpaw meowed darkly, her eyes narrowed.

"Yeah." Stormpaw agreed, eyeing his sister warily. Now that he had taken the time to truly look at her, he began to notice little things that he hadn't before. Cinderpaw's silver pelt was crisscrossed with very shallow scratches, the worst being a semi-deep scratch going down her shoulder. He also noticed that she seemed more muscled,

her normally sleek pelt showing off her leaner frame. Glancing around, Stormpaw straightened as he watched Sorrelstripe and Spottedtail stand, Sorrelstripe's tawny tail lashing.

"Everyone, can I have your attention please?" Spottedtail called, standing up as she looked at the clans.

Everyone began to quiet down, allowing Stormpaw a chance to survey the gathered cats again. He let out a small breath as he caught sight of Rainpaw sitting with Bramblestorm and Honeypool, the two warriors perched on either side of the apprentice.

"I'm sure you all are aware that our new home awaits us soon. But I think tonight we should start the journey. We can make camp later on tonight, and make a good start for tomorrow. Opinions?" Spottedtail called, her voice gentle as she eyed the clan.

Nettlefang raised his tail, stepping forward from his seat with Sootwhisker and Birdheart. "I think it's a good idea. But what about Birdheart's kits?"

Moonflower stepped forward, her soft blue eyes gentle. "We can take turns helping carry and keep an eye on a Twigkit and Daisykit."

Her answer seemed to satisfy Nettlefang, the warrior nodding as he resumed siting.

"Once we all finish eating, we'll start heading that way. And from now till we reach our new home, any cat you meet outside of SkyClan, I'd like you to invite them to join us. We will need to increase our numbers if we wish to remain." Spottedtail spoke, looking relieved as the clan murmured their agreement.

"Spottedtail! Spottedtail!" Mousepaw called out, his chant being joined by the rest of the SkyClan cats.

Stormpaw grinned as he joined the chants, Sandpaw and the rest of the gathered cats joining in until the clearing rang with the spotted leader's name.

"She's going to be an amazing leader." Honeypool meowed as she

came to sit beside Stormpaw, her eyes warm.

Cinderpaw nodded, her voice friendly as she responded to the tabby's statement. "You're right. SkyClan will be in good paws."

Honeypool nodded, her ear flicking. Before she could say something, Sootwhisker appeared, his dark eyes focused on Honeypool. "Honeypool, would you care to go for a walk with me?" He meowed softly, barely acknowledging Stormpaw or Cinderpaw.

"Sure." Honeypool purred, rising to her paws. "I'll see you both later." She added, nodding to Stormpaw then Cinderpaw.

The two apprentices watched as Sootwhisker led Honeypool off, their pelts brushing against each other softly.
Cinderpaw broke into a snicker as she watched, her head shaking in amusement.

"What's so funny?" Tigerfrost's voice rumbled, the silver apprentice's laughter masking his approach. Glancing at the warrior, Stormpaw just smiled as Cinderpaw continued to laugh.

"It's just-any cat can see Honeypool and Sootwhisker are getting close. I'm sure he thinks a lot of her, enough to ask her to stay with SkyClan ." Cinderpaw chuckled, her laughter calming down as she sat up.

"What? No. Honeypool wouldn't go for such an arrogant mouse-brain like him. He's not even a real clan cat, so he's obviously not good enough." Tigerfrost rolled his eyes, his voice rude and snobbish as he shrugged.

"What does that mean? If they care for each other, why shouldn't they be together?" Cinderpaw meowed, her eyes narrowing a fraction.

"I'm just saying. She could have any tom she wanted, she's a pretty shecat, a good hunter, why would she pick a loner like him?" Tigerfrost defended, his tail tip flicking back and forth as he glared back at Cinderpaw.

Stormpaw winced, drawing back at the look of shock, hurt, then

anger that crossed his sister's face in the matter of seconds. Cinderpaw shook her head slowly, her tail lashing as she took a step forward to hiss in Tigerfrost's face.

"Well if Honeypool is so great and pretty and such a good hunter, you might as well hurry along and ask her to be your mate! Since you're so worried about her and any other tom." Cinderpaw hissed furiously, not giving the warrior a chance to respond as she shoved past him, her tail lashing.

Both Stormpaw and Tigerfrost watched as Cinderpaw stalked out of the clearing, her silver tail flashing before it disappeared into the bushes.

"Your sister is the most hotheaded, impulsive-" Tigerfrost began to rant, his eyes narrowed into slits.

"Careful. You may be my clan mate, but that doesn't give you a free pass to disrespect Cinderpaw. She's right. You spend all your time flirting with her and acting as if she's so great, then when Honeypool stops showing you attention and instead shows interest in someone else, you pitch a fit like a spoiled kit." Stormpaw warned, his voice harsh. "If my sister is so difficult, then stop bothering her. Stop using her as a means of entertainment."

He turned away, leaving the black tabby warrior tk stare after him with his mouth open. Stormpaw meant every single word; he had watched the way Honeypool openly pined after Tigerfrost only for the warrior tk flirt with Cinderpaw. He didn't like it, and he didn't like how the tom seemed so clueless about what kind of pain he was putting the two shecat's through.

Shaking his head, Stormpaw took a seat off to the edge of the clearing by himself. Huffing quietly, he began to groom his pelt, his back arching as he cleaned his belly fur thoroughly.

"Hey, mind if I sit with you?" Sandpaw's voice sounded in front of him, her light green eyes meeting his as he sat up again.

"Yeah sure." He smiled faintly, watching as she sat by his side.

"I saw Cinderpaw storm off. Trouble with her and Tigerfrost?" Sandpaw meowed, her head tilting. Stormpaw was struck at how sincere she looked; her green eyes soft and warm.

"Uh-yeah. I guess he had a problem with Honeypool and Sootwhisker spending time together. Cinderpaw and him had a bit of an arguemenr over it." Stormpaw nodded, his shoulders dropping. "I've never seen Cinderpaw that upset."

"Well, from what I've seen, she and him were pretty close. I'm sure it would hurt if someone you cared about kept on acting as if they wanted someone else over you." Sandpaw meowed reasonably, her eyes blinking slowly. "Right?"

"Yeah. Right." Stormpaw agreed, shuffling his paws. "You truly do love being in SkyClan, don't you?"

"Honestly? Yes. I feel as if I belong. I feel like it's home for me. What about you, don't you think of ThunderClan the same way?"

"I-" suddenly Stormpaw found he did not. He had grown up in ThunderClan, wjth his family and friends. He knew the territory well, and he felt comfortable there. But he also felt comfortable amongst the SkyClan cats. He knew he disliked being around Willowstep and the elders at times: it felt as if every move he made they had to comment about how his mother's father Stormpelt would do it differently.
"I don't know. I know that it gets hard with my clan watching me and waiting for me to be this incredible apprentice just because I share my grandfather's name, but besides that? I don't know."

"It can be hard to outshine a legacy that was never yours to take on." Sandpaw murmured softly, her eyes full of sympathy. "But at the end of the day, it will always be your decisions and your actions that define you. Not his."

Chapter thirteen

Cinderpaw gritted her teeth as she slammed her paws into the body below her, using the momentum to shove herself out of range.

"Good! Use your speed to confuse your enemies!" Duskheart called from the sidelines, his hazel eyes dark as he watched Cinderpaw and Bramblestorm circle each other again.

This was the first night that the two had trained together, with Cherryfang watching from her perch in a nearby tree and Duskheart calling his encouragements from beside the training clearing. Bramblestorm proved to be just as bit as formidable as Cherryfang seemed, and Cinderpaw found it hard to dodge his heavy blows. What she did find, was that he would often sheathe his claws when dealing a particularly nasty hit, only unsheathing them when he knew it wouldn't be as major. For that she was thankful; although she was sure it had more to do with Rainpaw being concerned for her then anything else.

"Stop." Cherryfang meowed as she dropped down onto the ground, stalking over to the two trainees. "You aren't even attempting to truly fight Bramblestorm. You need to be faster. And Cinderpaw, you should use your speed better. Or are all of the new ThunderClan cats so slow and lazy?"

Cinderpaw felt a rush of irritation towards the dark forest shecat, her head dipping k be tk show she understood. The silvery apprentice longed for the training sessions where it was just her and Duskheart; the grey-brown tom was harsh and rarely showed any mercy but he at least was better at mentoring her.

"I think we should stop for tonight. You'll be setting off back to the clans today." Duskheart meowed as he stepped forward, his tail flicking. "And Cinderpaw, I happen to know that a special surprise waits for you back in ThunderClan. So be ready, be vigilant."

Bramblestorm nodded once before he faded away, Cinderpaw lingering as she blinked her thanksntowards Duskheart. "I will."

Groaning at the dull ache in her shoulder, Cinderpaw sat up as she blinked the sleep away. Glancing around, she could see the SkyClan cats waking as well as her own clanmates. Honeypool and Sootwhisker laid curled up together a few tail-lengths away, and Bramblestorm curled up beside Rainpaw, the two pressed together. A few mouse-lengths from her own nest, Stormpaw stretched out, his mouth opened as he snored loudly.

Tigerfrost slowly woke up from his makeshift nest, having moved it further from her the night before. Meeting her gaze, the dark tabby opened his mouth briefly before closing it, turning his head and beginning to groom his pelt vigorously.

'*Whatever. I don't need him, or anyone.*' Cinderpaw thought bitterly, her ears pinned back to her head as she turned away.

More and more of the gathered cats began to wake up, all stretching and grooming themselves as they mulled about restlessly, excited to get started on their journey.

"Alright everyone!" Spottedtail called, her, Sorrelstripe, Pinefur, Owlflame, Ravensight and Moonwhisker standing at the front of the group. "It's time we head out. Apprentices, warriors, make sure to keep an eye out for any dangers that could harm our clan. Birdheart, when your kits need to be carried please let us know and we will help as much as we can. Let's set out."

With a collective murmur of agreement, the group began their journey.

Cinderpaw found herself walking even with her mentor's shoulder, the grey warrior glancing at her with a sweet smile.

"Cinderpaw, you look upset. What's going on?" Mistyrain meowed, her voice low as she glanced at her apprentice worriedly.

"It's nothing. Just an argument with me and Tigerfrost." Cinderpaw shook her head, her tail tip twitching.

"Wanna talk about it? I know when me and Falconstrike argue, I often feel better talking about it." Mistyrain offered, her paw steps

even.

"You and Falconstrike argue? I couldn't imagine it, you both love each other so much. It would be like my parents arguing!" Cinderpaw snorted at the thought of her sweet tempered mother and her stubborn father ever arguing.

"They used to argue all the time we apprentices." Mistyrain laughed. "Your mother, although sweet, can certainly hold her own. And your father used to be very arrogant and rude to everyone, even her."

"Thistlefang was rude to her? But he acts like she made the stars." Cinderpaw meowed, her eyes wide with surprise as she peered up at her mentor.

"Every couple has their fights Cinderpaw. Just like every mentor and apprentice disagrees on things. Lucky for us, we get along very well." Mistyrain purred.

"You're right. It's just..Tigerfrost was so upset at the idea of Honeypool joining SkyClan, I can't help but think that he prefers her more than me. Sure we talk a lot, but what if he only does that because he thinks I'm just his friend?"

"Young love can be hard. I'm sure you've heard of how I transferred from RiverClan to be with Falconstrike as an apprentice?" Mistyrain inquired, her head tilting.

Shaking her head, Cinderpaw found herself walking slower as she listened.

"Not a lot of cats know, except for Falconstrike's brother and mine, but as an apprentice I met with Falconstrike a lot. We would meet every night at the border, and at the Gatherings as well. When the battle with Duskheart came, I was the first to volunteer to stay in ThunderClan camp. During that battle I knew I couldn't leave him behind. Rainstar allowed me to stay, but I am no longer a RiverClan cat. She and Mudstar both allow me to visit on occasion, such as when my father and mother were elders and died." Mistyrain sighed. "Don't waste time fighting, when you have so little time to

love."

Cinderpaw nodded slowly, her mentor's words sinking in. "You're right. Thank you Mistyrain."

Speeding up, Cinderpaw drew even with Tigerfrost. The dark tom had been walking alone, his shoulders stiff as he stared foreword.

"What Cinderpaw?" He sighed, pausing to look at her out of the corner of his eye.

"I'm sorry I got so mad. I just-look, I care about you. More than I ever have anyone really. And I hate the idea of you with any other shecat, because I don't want you with anyone but me." Cinderpaw rushed out. "And I just, I don't want to loose you."

Tigerfrost shook his head as he stopped, turning to face her directly. "Cinderpaw..I've only ever cared for you. Honeypool is like my sister, so of course I'd be concerned if she left ThunderClan. But you? You make me laugh, and sure you make me mad, but you've always been someone I can count on to talk to. I'm sorry too for not making that clear."

"So are we okay?" She murmured, staring up at him as he purred, leaning down to rub his nose against her cheek.

"Yes, Mouse-brain, we are good."

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Cinderpaw smiled gently as she nudged Twigkit forward. "Just a bit further and we can rest." She promised, watching as the tom nodded tiredly. The clan had been traveling for almost two days now, only stopping when needed. It was the last stretch, and just on the horizon Cinderpaw could see the faint shimmer of the lake. With a burst of excitement she grinned, happy to see the familiar territory. It was the night of the Gathering, and Ravensight had decided to take SkyClan along to meet the clans.

"You're good with Twigkit and Daisykit." Tigerfrost meowed from her side, his eyes soft.

"They're easy going kits. Daisykit can be a bit spirited at times, but she's very sweet." Cinderpaw meowed, her whiskers twitching as she watched the two sandy grey kits hurry to catch up with their mother.

Spottedtail had tried her best to keep spirits high, but had resigned to encouraging everyone as much as she could. Cinderpaw could see the spotted shecat padding at the front alongside Pinefur and Mistyrain, with Ravensight trailing behind.

Just a bit ahead, Stormpaw and Sandpaw laughed as they padded alongside each other, their voices bright. Cinderpaw couldn't help but feel concerned for her brother; how would he react once they reached the lake and it was time for him and Sandpaw to part?

Rainpaw walked a bit away from Cinderpaw, Bramblestorm at her side as the two helped Russet climb down the steep bank. Cinderpaw still didn't trust the dark tabby tom, and knowing he knew about her training wjth Duskheart only made her fur bristle more.

The thought of her nighttime mentor made Cinderpaw tense. She wasn't ready to face the fact that she was tired of training with him. She was worried about how the training seemed to get more and more vicious, less like training to protect her clanmates and more like she was fighting for her life every night. Her shoulders often ached with the bruises and shallow scratches of her nighttime activities, and Cinderpaw knew Rainpaw wouldn't keep finding dock leaves to treat her without answers.

"You know, I'm really glad Mudstar picked me to come on this quest. I'm glad we got the chance to spend more time together than back home." Tigerfrost meowed, his eyes warm.

"I am too. You're a really good tom, and a great warrior." She meowed softly, her whiskers twitching as she looked up at him.

"You're incredible yourself. You have a lot of talent, in fighting and in being a general apprentice. I've never met someone quite like you." Tigerfrost complemented warmly, purring as Cinderpaw ducked her head in embarrassment.

"Tigerfrost.." she murmured, her pelt heating up as she slowed down, the tom matching her pace as he gazed at her.

"You don't have to say anything Cinderpaw. I know." Tigerfrost murmured as he brushed his cheek against hers before resuming his pace, his tail flicking as Bramblestorm called his name.

Rainpaw dropped back, watching as Bramblestorm and Tigerfrost spoke quietly before making their way towards Honeypool.

"Hey." Cinderpaw greeted her sister, her steps quickening to stay in step with the taller apprentice.

"Hey," Rainpaw meowed back, her blue eyes soft and friendly. "You notice how close Sandpaw and Stormpaw are?"

"Yes. I was just worrying how he will be when we have to return home." Cinderpaw sighed, her head shaking. "I just hope he doesn't revert back to his silent self again."

"You don't think that he would, you know, *stay* with SkyClan, do you?" Rainpaw meowed, her voice hesitant.

"I-no. No way. Stormpaw wouldn't just leave us or our parents like that." Cinderpaw shook her head. "Why would you even suggest it!"

"I'm not, I'm just saying. He's never seemed to connect with anyone like he has with Sandpaw. Maybe he feels like he would belong in SkyClan more?"

"That's a mouse-brained idea Rainpaw. Stormpaw is a ThunderClan cat, born and raised. Why would he be disloyal!" Cinderpaw snapped, her head shaking.

Rainpaw fell silent, her eyes staying fixed ahead as the clan found themselves at the edge of the lake, where Mistyrain leapt into the tree-bridge and began helping them across.

"Cinderpaw.." Stormpaw meowed, his voice low as he bounded over to meet his sisters. "This is our first gathering."!

"Oh." Cinderpaw meowed softly, her eyes widening. It was their

first gathering; almost immediately after being made apprentices they had left and had just come back after so long of being gone.

"Walk together?" Rainpaw meowed gently, her voice shaky with nerves.

"Of course." The three shared a warm look before Stormpaw led them into the bridge, making their way across.

'*I hope the other clans accept SkyClan, and that our journey wasn't for nothing.*' Cinderpaw thought.

Allegiances part two

Thunderclan

Leader: Mudstar- massive dark brown tom with green eyes and battle scarred ears

Deputy: Spiderclaw- black tom with green eyes and lighter brown legs and underbelly
(apprentice Petalpaw)

Medicine cat: Snowfall- small long haired pale grey and white patched tom with pale blue eyes

Ravensight- thin black tomcat with pale greenish-grey eyes

Warriors

Sagefern- pretty grey shecat with hazel eyes

Larktail- Grey and white shecat with yellow eyes

Thistlefang- broad shouldered golden brown tabby tom with amber eyes, darker tabby stripes, and various battle scars

Skyfeather- delicately built long haired silver and white tabby shecat with pale blue eyes

Lightningtail- long legged black tom with golden eyes

Sparrowstrike- stocky dark brown tom with amber eyes and a battle scarred pelt.

Cherrythorn- dark ginger shecat (with darker flecks), pale green eyes

Nightmist- long haired black shecat with green eyes

Foxfang- a russet furred tom with green eyes and a bushy tail

Oakfur- light brown tabby tom

Falconstrike- large black tomcat with copper eyes and especially long claws
(apprentice Hawkpaw)

Pinefur- a dark brown tom with black tabby markings, hazel eyes.

Owlflame- muscular dappled brown tom with fierce yellow eyes

Thornheart - dark brown tom with green eyes and faint tabby markings.
(apprentice Petalpaw)

Ashwind- dark ginger tom (with darker flecks), green eyes.
(apprentice Lionpaw)

Featherheart- small cream tabby shecat with white paws

Blossomtail- tall dark tabby shecat with pale gold eyes

Tawnyfrost- long legged brown shecat with copper eyes and black swirled tabby markings

Honeypool - lean light brown tabby shecat with yellow eyes and white paws

Bramblestorm- handsome spiky furred light brown tabby tom with green eyes and distinctive black stripes

Tigerfrost- broad shouldered black tabby tom with dark blue eyes

Rainbreeze - blue-grey shecat with light blue eyes

Cinderflame- a stocky thick furred silver tabby shecat with copper colored eyes

Stormfall- broad shouldered golden brown tabby tom with clear hazel eyes

Apprentices

Petalpaw- pretty brown tabby shekit

Hawkpaw- black and grey tabby tom

Lionpaw- a grey tom with black paws and yellow eyes.

Queens

Holly- pretty reddish ginger tabby shecat. Mother of Foxfang's kits: Hollykit, a dark ginger shecat with lighter paws, and Jaykit, a ginger tom with blue eyes.

Mistyrain- pretty grey shecat with tawny eyes. Formerly of Riverclan, expecting Falconstrike's kits

Elders

Mossheart- tortoiseshell tom

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Shadowclan

Leader- Newtstar- dark grey tabby tom with amber eyes

Deputy-Rustfang- dark ginger tom

Medicine cat- Seedwhisker- dappled cream colored shecat with green eyes and black paws
(apprentice Bumblepaw)

Warriors

Jaggedfur- brown tabby tom with unruly fur and blue eyes. Former kittypet named Jack.

Mothfur- pale brown tom

Cloversplash - a small cream colored shecat with darker cream colored tabby spots.

Sedgefoot- black tabby tom

Ivyleap- tawny and white shecat
(apprentice Bramblepaw)

Petalbreeze- light ginger tabby she at with cream colored paws and pale green eyes.

Russetfeather - reddish tabby tomcat

Sparkfoot - dark ginger tabby tomcat

Rockclaw - deep ginger tomcat with white paws

Apprentices

Bramblepaw- creamy brown tom with white paws, green eyes

Bumblepaw- grey tabby tom with white patches along his pelt

Queens

Honeyheart- pretty grey shecat with green eyes

Elders

Alderheart- light grey tabby tom

Heatherleaf- a wiry black shecat with green eyes.

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Riverclan

Leader- Rainstar- pale gray shecat (with darker flecks), dark blue eyes.

Deputy- Bristletail- large brown tomcat with green eyes and an especially scruffy pelt.
(apprentice Yarrowpaw)

Medicine cat- Streamheart- grey tom with blue eyes and black paws, ears and muzzle.

Mossypelt - pretty brown shecat with yellow eyes

Warriors

Brackenclaw- grey-brown Tom

Beetlewhisker- cream tabby Tom with distinct black stripes

Rushheart- lanky brown tabby tomcat

Liontail- black tom with green eyes
(apprentice Ashpaw)

Jayheart- golden tabby tom with amber eyes

Fernpelt- golden spotted shecat with green eyes
(apprentice Splashpaw)

Apprentices

Yarrowpaw- cream colored shecat

Splashpaw - grey tomcat

Ashpaw- speckled grey shecat with copper eyes

Queens

Hollyfur- long haired black shecat with blue eyes

Mintflower- pale grey shecat with yellow eyes. Mother of Mosskit, a grey tabby shecat

Elders

Dewleap- a black and white patched Tom with green eyes

Shadowfang -black Tom with white patches and blue eyes

Rosecloud- a pure white shecat with long legs and blue eyes

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Windclan

Leader:Thornstar- dark ginger Tom with amber eyes,

Deputy: Amberwind- dark ginger shecat
(apprentice Moonpaw)

Medicine cat: Jayflight- dark brown tomcat with pale blue eyes
(apprentice Sorrelpaw!

Warriors

Furzetail -a mottled tabby Tom

Rocktail - a black Tom with green eyes

Cloudyheart - dark grey and white tabby shecat

Finchfang - brown tabby tom with blue eyes
(Apprentice Sparkpaw)

Eagleclaw- stocky dark brown tomcat with blue eyes

Rabbitheart- light brown tabby shecat
(apprentice Poppypaw)

Apprentices

Sparkpaw- dark ginger shecat

Poppypaw- a golden brown tabby shecat with white paws

Sorrelpaw: lanky white she-cat with green eyes

Moonpaw - grey tabby shecat with yellow eyes

Queens

Hazelstep - a grey-brown shecat with pale golden colored eyes, mother of Finchfang's kit: Tallkit- large black tomcat. adoptive mother to Rabbitkit, a brown and white tom, and Sootkit, a dark brown tom.

Cats Outside the Clans

Bird- lanky brown Tom

Raintail- black shecat with blue eyes. Formerly of Thunderclan

Creek- massive black tom with Amber eyes.

Sammy- black and white tom with green eyes

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SkyClan

Leader: Spottedstar -speckled shecat with a solid ginger tail and blue eyes
(apprentice Leafpaw)

Deputy: Sorrelspots- ginger and white shecat with Amber eyes
(apprentice Sandpaw)

Medicine cat: Moonflower- pretty light brown and white tabby shecat

Warriors

Nettlefang- a black and white Tom
(apprentice Sagepaw)

Shrewfoot- brown tom with blue eyes

Roseblossom - a ginger tabby shecat with green eyes

Sparrowstorm- a lanky brown Tom with blue eyes

Sootwhisker- dark grey, almost black tom with dark blue eyes and lighter grey paws.
(apprentice Mousepaw)

Thrushwhisker- sand colored tom with green eyes and long whiskers

Apprentices

Sandpaw - light ginger tabby shecat with lighter colored paws

Leafpaw- muscular white and grey Tom with pale yellow eyes

Sagepaw- small white shecat with green eyes

Mousepaw- little grey tabby tom with long whiskers

Queens

Birdheart- Grey-brown tabby shecat with green eyes. Mother of Daisykit, a grayish brown shecat, and Twigkit, a grey tabby tomkit.

elders

Russetsky - old dark ginger tom with hazel eyes and powerful hind legs

Chaoter fourteen

Rainpaw felt a wave of awe rush over her as she entered the gathering clearing, the moonlight making the entire area bright.

Around them, cats of all clans mingled and laughed, voices chattering and bright. Everywhere she looked were tabbies, tortoiseshells, and mottled pelts milling about the moonlit clearing. All of the sound began to die down as the gathered cats started to notice the newcomers, with Mudstar leaping down from his perch on the Great Oak to rush forward, greeting Pinefur and Owlflame loudly as he purred. Behind him came several more of ThunderClan, including Skyfeather, Thistlefang, Falconstrike and Specklednose.

Rainpaw felt a rush of happiness flood her as she caught sight of her mother and father hurrying through the crowd, Rainpaw glancing behind herself to see her littermates hurrying to her side. Cinderpaw reached her first, the two shecats joined by their brother as they weaved around the reuniting clanmates to meet their parents.

"Oh my kits." Skyfeather purred loudly as she nuzzled Stormpaw's cheek, turning to lick Cinderpaw between the ears as Thistlefang pressed his side to Rainpaw's.

"You three made it back safely, and I assume the quest was successful?" Thistlefang meowed warmly, greeting his son and other daughter as Skyfeather continued to nuzzle her kits.

The ThunderClan cats' reunions were cut short as Newtstar cleared his throat loudly, pointedly looking at Mudstar as he waited. "Mudstar, who are these cats?"

Mudstar sighed, pulling away from his sons to glance over at Ravensight, who in turn touched Spottedtail her shoulder. Gesturing for the SkyClan leader to follow him, Mudstar returned to his earlier seat, his eyes focused.

"I've told you about the quest to find the lost clan, and this is them. This is SkyClan, and they have come home again." Mudstar meowed, gesturing for Spottedtail to speak. The clans all grew silent, watching as the speckled shecat looked around nervously.

"Cats of the clans, I am Spottedtail, leader of SkyClan. I will admit, I am new to clan life. I know that there were once five clans by the lake, and there shall be again. I am in understanding with Ravensight of ThunderClan that the old SkyClan camp and territory lay between ThunderClan and ShadowClan, and if Newtstar and Mudstar will allow me to, I'd like for our clan to re-inhabit our ancestral home." Spottedtail meowed loudly and clearly, the clans all sharing bewildered looks.

Rainpaw glanced around, watching as Tigerfrost and Cinderpaw sat together, their pelts brushing. Stormpaw sat a few tail lengths away, him and Sandpaw murmuring to each other intently. Bramblestorm soon found his way to her side, settling down next to her. She felt a low purr rumble as the brown tabby tom nudged her shoulder, the two sharing a warm look before looking back at the leaders.

"Spottedtail, as the leader of ShadowClan, I will be happy to move my border for you to reclaim your new home. Perhaps when you return from receiving your nine lives, we can take a walk decide the permanent border between our clans." Newtstar spoke first, his eyes warming up. "And I welcome you home again."

At his words, ShadowClan cheered, being joined by the others after a few seconds. Rainpaw felt relieved as she watched Spottedtail meow her thanks.

"Spottedtail, you and your clan are welcome to shelter with us tonight, tomorrow we will send a patrol to help you reconstruct dens and nests." Mudstar spoke next, his voice kind.

"Thank you, both of you." Spottedtail meowed gratefully.

"I think we should call this Gathering to an end, and allow our new clan to rest." Rainstar meowed, her voice low and tired. Rainpaw eyed the RiverClan leader, noting how dull the shecat's speckled pelt was and how her shoulders seemed to be hunched wearily

The clans all dismissed, Rainpaw finding herself next to her mother. "How is everyone? Breezepaw and Hazelpaw?" Rainpaw meowed brightly, her tail flicking in excitement.

Skyfeather looked sad, her eyes full of sympathy and heartache. "Oh Rainpaw..after you and the others left, we had a bad run in with a den of foxes. We lost a lot of clanmates."

"What? Who? W-why.." Rainpaw spoke, her eyes wide. "Is.."

"Come along. We will discuss it more when we get home." Thistlefang meowed gently, appearing at his mate's shoulder as he nuzzled his daughter. "You've gotten so strong!"

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Once back at the camp, SkyClan found themselves sitting together as Mudstar called a clan meeting, many of them sharing friendly looks as the ThunderClan leader introduced his clan to Spottedtail and hers.

"As for our returning clanmates, I must share some troubling and sad news. We have experienced a lot of loss since your departure. Among them are Dustyleaf, Larktail, Hazelpaw, Meadowheart, Redpelt, Violetshine, Lionclaw, and Willowstep. Spiderclaw has stepped in as deputy." Mudstar apoke gently, his voice low.

The questing cats looked full of pain and sorrow, their heads lowered as they felt grief wash through the clearing.

Ravensight looked the worse, his paws giving out at the mention of the moss of the clan elders. He let out a soft cry, his body shaking as Falconstrike and Mistyrain pressed against him. Snowfall curled his tail around the black tom, comforting him as the medicine cat's cries softened.
'*I think he was rather close with Willowstep and Lionclaw..'* Rainpaw thought, her heart aching for the medicine cat.

"With these terrible losses, we were given a moment of joy. Foxfang's mate, Holly, has joined ThunderClan, and is expecting his kits." Mudstar continued, everyone turning their attention to him.

Glancing around, Rainpaw caught sight of Foxfang sitting next to a pretty reddish tabby shecat, the two pressed close together.

"But tonight, I feel something else should be shown as a moment of joy. I have spoken with Spottedtail, and she has told me of the bravery, kindness and determination all of the questing cats have shown. She has asked to be present for this, and I have decided to allow it. Rainpaw, Cinderpaw and Stormpaw, will you three come forward."

Rainpaw stepped forward, her eyes wide as she looked at first her parent who looked shocked and proud, then her siblings, Cinderpaw's dark amber eyes full of excitement and Stormpaw looking nervously excited, then to Bramblestorm. The warrior looked proud and happy, his pale green eyes watching her warmly.

"I ask StarClan to look at these three apprentices. They have trained, journeyed far and returned home, safe and successful. I commend them as warriors in their turn and tonight I shall make them as such." Mudstar meowed, his voice warm. "Stormpaw, step closer."

Stormpaw did, his eyes full of excitement and strangely, worry as his paws shifted. Rainpaw could see the difference in him in comparison to when they first became apprentices, his shoulders more broad like Thistlefang's, and his legs long and muscular.

The clan all chattered excitedly, falling silent as Mudstar gestured for the chatter to die down.

"You have shown yourself to be a brave and noble cat with a good heart. I ask our ancestors to see and accept this young tom as a full warrior of ThunderClan. Stormpaw, you have shown yourself to be strong, fearless and kind. And for that, I now name you as Stormfall. Never forget where you come from, and never loose who you are." Mudstar announced, his chin resting on top of Stormfall' shear as the golden tabby licked his shoulder respectfully.

"Stormfall! Stormfall!" The clan cheered, Skyfeather and Thistlefang being the loudest.

Stormfall looked to his sisters, his excitement and confidence clear in the golden depths of his eyes. Rainpaw didn't hesitate to step closer, nuzzling her brother affectionately as Cinderpaw stood in front of him, the silver shecat purring. Stormfall sat to the side as his sisters returned to their earlier position.

"Alright, settle down!" Mudstar called with a purr, his whiskers twitching. "Cinderpaw, you are quick and strong, and both Spottedtail and Mistyrain assure me that you are more than ready. I'm fact, I was made aware by Sorrelspots and a Cinderflame both of your incredible skill in battle. A trait km sure you got from your favorite uncle: me." Mudstar teased, grinning as the clans laughed. Raising his goal for attention, he continued to speak, "From this day till you meet our ancestors, you will be known as Cinderflame, in honor of your spirit, unflinching bravery, and unwavering loyalty."

"Cinderflame! Cinderflame!" The clan cheered, Rainpaw laughing as she watched Tigerfrost dramatically call the new warrior's name.

'*Please let me be good enough*.' She thought, her pelt prickling as Mudstar turned his gaze onto her next. She has never really interacted with the ThunderClan leader, even if he was her uncle. It just felt..strange, to know that despite her being more distant, that he had noticed such crucial things about her littermate's and that he seemed as proud of them as he would if it had been his own kits.

"Rainpaw, at first you were a timid and quiet apprentice, but you have returned confident and sure. I knew giving Owlflame as your mentor would ensure you grew into a confident and fierce warrior, without destroying your kind heart and sweet nature. I have heard from several SkyClan cats of your kindness and willingness to listen and be there for anyone in need. Especialky from two certain SkyClan kits, about how you and Bramblestorm showed them how to do a hunting crouch. From now till you reach the stars, you will be known as Rainbreeze in honor of your kindness, loyalty, and determination." Mudstar meowed warmly, smiling as Rainbreeze looked up at him with a bright smile. Stepping forward, she licked his shoulder as he rested his chin on her head briefly.

" Rainbreeze! Rainbreeze! " the clans cheered, Bramblestorm moving to muzzle her cheek warmly as she laughed. Rainbreeze

purred happily as she basked in the warmth, loving how the clan seemed to cheer her name longer and louder the more she listened.

-

The following moon was long and hard. With Spottedtail going to get her nine lives and returning as the official leader of SkyClan, then with the combined efforts of both ShadowClan and ThunderClan to help them get their territory in order.

Now ThunderClan sat gathered in their camp, watching as Foxfang led his two kits, Jaykit and Hollykit, towards the front. Rainbreeze couldn't help but purr as she watched Hollykit dash forward, Jaykit following less enthusiastically. The ginger tomkit was more quiet and thoughtful than his eager and energetic littermate, the two reminding Rainbreeze of herself and Cinderflame.

Sparing a glance, Rainbreeze watched as Cinderflame and Tigerfrost pushed their way out of the warriors den, their pelts brushing as the mated pair hurried to take their seats next to Rainbreeze and Bramblestorm.

"Hey." Cinderflame greeted, her voice low.

Rainbreeze nudged her shoulder in response as they turned to watch the ceremony. Rainbreeze let out a low snort at the sight of Stormfall, his golden pelt ruffled and his ears pinned to his head, hurried to sit beside his sisters. "Where have you been?" She whispered, her ear flicking back as Stormfall settled more.

"Out on a walk." The golden tom responded, nodding in greeting to Cinderflame, Bramblestorm and Tigerfrost.

"Today we gather to make two kits into apprentices. Jaykit, Hollykit, you both are blessings from StarClan, ones that were very much needed after we lost so many of our friends and family. I hope that your training proves to be successful and you both grow to be excellent warriors." Mudstar spoke, his voice warm and gentle as he looked down at the two kits.

"Jaykit, from this day until you reach your warrior ceremony, you

will be known as Jaypaw. Rainbreeze, you are a new warrior but a very skilled one. Pass along all the skills and compassion that makes a warrior noble, and all the fierce bravery that Owlflame helped cultivate in yourself." Mudstar called, his eyes full of amusement as Rainbreeze looked up at him with wide eyes.

Her, a mentor? With an apprentice already? At the encoring nudge forward from Stormfall, Rainbreeze made her way to meet her new apprentice. Jaypaw looked scared, his eyes wide as he stared up at her worriedly.

Leaning down to touch her nose to his, she let out a soft breath. "Don't worry, I'm as scared as you." She promised, feeling pleased as the small tom relaxed and nodded. The two moved to sit next to each other, Jaypaw's eyes fixed on his sister.

"Hollykit, from this day forward you will be known as Hollypaw. Cinderflame, you are fierce and determined, traits I hope you will pass along and cultivate in Hollypaw." Mudstar spoke next, looking even more amused as he watched Cinder flame stumble forwards to meet her apprentice. The two touched noses, with Hollypaw looking extremely pleased as she practically bounced along.

Rainbreeze felt a tail run along her back, and looking to the side she was met with Bramblestorm's warm green gaze as he pressed against her. "Hey."

"Good job." He praised, a purr rumbling. "And good luck, I'm proud of you."

"Thank you." She meowed softly, nuzzling into his side. The two shared a warm look before turning to see their friends, Rainbreeze purring as her mother rushed over to muzzle her cheek. Stormfall sat down a tail-length away, his eyes full of anxiety.

"Look at my daughters, mentors already!" Thistlefang purred as he moved towards Rainbreeze and Cinderflame; Tigerfrost trailing behind.

"I'm excited." Cinderflame grinned, her tail lashing. "We get to mentor together!" She turned to look at Stormfall, her tail lashing,

"and soon you will as well!"

"I know!" Rainbreeze grinned, laughing as she shuffled her paws. The laughter paused as Stormfall cleared his throat.

"I'm joining SkyClan." The golden tabby tom rushed out. "I know you won't really understand but, I think it's where I belong. I don't feel like ThunderClan is my home anymore. I've spoken with Duskpetal, Smokefang, Honeypool, and Sparkfire about it as well. I just don't feel at home here, not anymore."

"What?" Cinderflame was the first to speak, her copper eyes full of pain and traces of anger and betrayal. "You're just going to leave the clan? Are you serious!"

"I am." Stormfall breathed. Rainbreeze glanced around, her pelt prickling as more wnd more of the clan began to notice the conversation between her siblings, Mudstar stepping forward as the two continued.

Skyfeather and Thistlefang looked sad, their eyes full of confusion and sorrow.

"You truly are disloyal. I thought you may have been when you were all giddy over that rogue shecat in SkyClan , but for you to actually prove it?" Cinderflame scoffed, her tail lashing. "Don't be a fool."

"I'm no fool Cinderflame." Stormfall growled, his pelt bristling as he glared at his sister. "Sandpaw had no part in my decision. In fact, she had no clue. I don't feel as if the forest is truly my home. Not anymore at least."

Before Cinderflame could retort, Rainbreeze stepped forward and pressed her cheek to her brother's shoulder. "I support you." She spoke softly. "Just promise me you'll be safe? That you'll take care of yourself?"

"I promise." Stormfall agreed.

"Well, I see we may be making a trip to SkyClan today." Mudstar spoke up, his voice low. "Are you certain this is what you want

Stormfall?"

"I am. I'm sorry Mudstar." Stormfall meowed.

"No. I'm glad you have the courage to decide for yourself where you feel you belong." Mudstar neowed. "I'll leave you to say goodbye, and in a bit we'll head out." The brown tom turned to face the clan, his voice growing louder. "And if anyone else wishes to join SkyClan, speak now or else you stay in this clan."

Rainbreeze turned to watch as Duskpetal, Smokefang, Sparkfire and Honeypool stepped forward, their pelts bristled nervously.

"Cinderflame, I'm sorry." Stormfall meowed, catching Rainbreeze's attention. Turning to look, the blue-grey warrior frowned at the look of utter fury on her silver pelted sibling's face.

"Leave. Since that's what you want so badly, stay gone. And you better hope we never meet in battle. I won't go easy on you, traitor." Cinderflame hissed before whipping around. "Hollypaw, let's go. We're going to start battle training."

The ginger shecat hurried to her new mentor, the two leaving soon after.

"Well, be safe. And be sure to keep yourself clean. And make sure to eat plenty of prey. And don't forget-" Skyfeather began, being cut off as Thistlefang pressed his tail to her mouth.

"Your mother tends to ramble when she's worried." The tom meowed as he nudged his son's side. "I'll see you at gatherings. I expect full reports on how you're doing."

"You got it." Stormfall purred, watching as their parents stepped away. Turning his yellow gaze onto Rainbreeze, she felt her heart squeeze at the sight of heartache on his face.

"She'll come around. You know Cinderflame gets upset easy. I'll see you soon brother." Rainbreeze promised as she nudged his shoulder.

Waving goodbye, she turned, gesturing for her own apprentice to follow her as she left the camp.

Chapter fifteen

Stormfall crept towards the pale ginger cat in front of him, his paw steps silent and quick. Pausing to gather his hind legs underneath his body, he smirked as his tail stiffened. Keeping his bronze colored gaze fixed on the figure ahead, he steadied his breathing. His prey had no clue, a fact demonstrated by the surprised hiss as Stormfall lunged, successfully pinning down the smaller cat. "Gotcha." He growled playfully, his paws pressed against it's shoulders as It struggled beneath him.

"Get off you big badger!" Sandpaw huffed, her whiskers twitching in amusement as she peered up at him. Pale green eyes flashed with mirth as the light ginger shecat pushedbat her clan-mate's chest, causing the tawny tabby tom to let her up.

"You know, if you want to become a warrior faster, you should probably get better at detecting when you're being stalked. What if I was a ShadowClan cat?" Stormfall continued, his ear flicking back as Sandpaw sat up.

"Please. Like ShadowClan would ever be as clumsy as you." The SkyClan apprentice teased, prodding his side with a pale ginger paw. "I heard you went on the patrol near ThunderClan with Spottedstar, how was that?"

"Honestly? Kind of weird. I saw Rainbreeze and Bramblestorm with her apprentice, and it felt strange to not be going back with them. But I love it here, I do." Stormfall meowed, sobering as he shuffled his paws. "I do miss my parents, and my littermates. But having some of my old clanmates with me here helps."

It had been a few sunrises since Stormfall had joined SkyClan, followed by Honeypool, Duskpetal, Smokefang, and Sparkfire. Spottedstar had been open to them joining, excited for the prospect of new warriors. The former ThunderClan cats were welcomed warmly, and Stormfall had heard from Sorrelspots that Spottedstar was debating on letting him mentor one of Birdheart's kits. It

warmed his heart to think about how his new clan accepted him: he truly felt at home in SkyClan , more at home then he had ever felt in ThunderClan.
He missed his sisters; Cinderflame's sarcastic humor and endless energy, Rainbreeze's soothing voice and gentle advice. But he had found his home, and he couldn't give that up.

"Hey, we better start back before Sorrelspots thinks we took off!" Sandpaw purred, picking up the thrush she had caught, waiting for the tom to get his own prey.

The two made their way back to the clearing where the hunting patrol had split up. Sitting and waiting were Sorrelspots and Sootwhisker, the clan deputy and warrior in a discussion that soon paused as Stormfall and Sandpaw entered the clearing.

"Nice catch. We should head back." Sorrelspots purred. "Good job Sandpaw, I see you caught your first bird."

"Thanks Sorrelspots!" Sandpaw purred, her chin lifting proudly at her mentor's praise.

"Stormfall, do you think you could do me a favor?" Sootwhisker meowed lowly as he eyed the golden tabby tom, his dark blue eyes full of worry.

"What's going on Sootwhisker?" Stormfall questioned as he walked alongside his clan mate, his tail flicking.

"It's Honeypool, she's been acting strange and I think she misses her brother. I was hoping you'd talk to her? Maybe see if there's a way I can set her mind to ease?" Sootwhisker rushed out, sounding uncomfortable as he set his catch, a rather large sparrow, down.

"Sure. I can do that." Stormfall agreed, setting his own prey down. "Is-"

He was cut off as Mousepaw appeared, the gray tom looking terrified as he bolted towards Sorrelspots and Sandpaw.

"Mousepaw? What's going on?" Sorrelspots questioned, her voice thick with concern at the frantic state of the normally high-strung

tom.

"I-it's ThunderClan, they're attacking the border. Spottedstar sent me to fetch you and Moonflower. Please, I saw Sagepaw being chased off." Mousepaw rushed, turning tail and darting away.

"Follow me." Sorrelspots hissed as she immediately wheeled around, dashing towards the ThunderClan border. The rest of the patrol followed, with Stormfall racing shoulder-to-shoulder with Sootwhisker, Sandpaw dashing a few mouse-lengths away.

"You going to be alright?" Sandpaw rushed as she raced at his side, her eyes full of concern.

"Yes. I can handle it." Stormfall meowed as he continued. He could; SkyClan was his home now, and he would defend it against anyone, even his former clanmates.

The sound of screeching and hisses alerted the patrol to the proximity of the battle, and with a grunt Stormfall crashed through the undergrowth. In front of him he could see the patrol of SkyClan cats, led by Spottedstar, being outnumbered.

Growling angrily, he took off, dashing to shove away a familiar silver tabby shecat as she swiped at a crouching Sagepaw, the white furred apprentice shooting him a thankful look as she scrambled back.

"Get to camp Sagepaw." He ordered, the bloody apprentice before turning to face his sister. "I won't fight you Cinderflame."

"Why, because you're my littermate? We belong to different clans." Cinderflame hissed, her tail lashing. Stormfall felt a chill run down his spine at the look of cold detachment that seemed to burn as bright as a flame in his sister's copper gaze. Around them, he could hear the sounds of the two clans fighting.

Stormfall was unprepared as Cinderflame lunged at him, her claws gripping his shoulders as she pummeled his stomach with her hind legs, ripping out chunks of his belly fur. Hissing furiously, he swung a heavy paw at her, cuffing her ears as he fought back, the two

locked.

Cinderflame didn't even let out a noise, her eyes gleaming fiercely as she continued to fight. The two broke apart, Stormfall panting heavily as he eyed the silver warrior. Without a warning, Cinderflame dove at him, only to twist out of the way and take her claws along his side. Twisting to attack, Stormfall felt a rush of confusion when he was met with an empty space where his sister had been, only to whirl around at the painful feeling of his tail being bitten.

'I can't beat her. I can't even catch her.' The golden tabby thought, his blood running cold as he continued tk try and defend himself. It felt as if she was everywhere, biting, clawing, slashing. Just as he managed to get an idea of where her next hit would be, she changed it. '*There's no way she learned this from Mistyrain, not when she's using moves Pinefur never taught me!'*

The tom let out a pained hiss at the feeling of claws catching on his ear, the thin flesh tearing as he jolted away. Turning to circle his sister, Stormfall watched Cinderflame move slowly, her eyes bright with bloodlust and her claws unsheathed. "I won't hurt you Cinderflame. You're my sister."

"Funny. I quit thinking of you as my brother the moment you betrayed ThunderClan." The warrior snapped before lunging again.

"Stop!" A loud cry sounded, and Stormfall was relieved, his eyes fixated on the sight of Cinderflame being shoved away from him. In front of him now stood Spottedstar, her mottled pelt bristling with anger as she glared at the silver ThunderClan shecat.

"I won't let my warrior fight his sibling, not when I know he wouldn't hurt you." The SkyClan leader growled, her ginger tail lashing as she towered over Cinderflame's crouching form.

Spottedstar then turned her gaze onto the rest of the ThunderClan patrol. "Run home ThunderClan. You've proven your point." Spottedstar hissed furiously, her voice harsh as she glared openly at the enemy clan.

Stormfall stood shakily, his body aching as he watched as the ThunderClan party gathered at the border, led by Bramblestorm and Cinderflame who both shot him a nasty glare before returning to their territory.

"We fought well today, let's get to camp. Stormfall, walk with me please." Spottedstar spoke, her voice softening as she addressed the young warrior.

Stormfall watched as the clan gathered and began to trek back, Sandpaw giving him a concerned look before she turned to follow her mentor. The only wound he could see on her pelt was a ripped ear.

"Yes Spottedstar?" Stormfall meowed gently, peering at his leader as he trailed behind with her.

"I know that was hard. And I'm sorry you had to fight your sister. But you defended Sagepaw and the clan well today. I've been debating on who would mentor Daisykit and Twigkit, and I'd like you to mentor Twigkit. I think he could learn a lot from you." Spottedstar meowed as she glanced at him.

"Really? That's an incredible honor. I'd love to mentor him. If I may ask, who will mentor Daisykit?"

"I was thinking maybe Sparkfire or Honeypool. They both seem like sensible choices." Spottedstar confided. "But I'm not sure which."

"If I may, I think Honeypool would enjoy it. So would Sparkfire, but Honeypool would be a wonderful mentor to Daisykit. She's very kindhearted and has always been there for me in the past." Stormfall suggested, slowing as he caught sight of the camp entrance.

"Thank you for your advice Stormfall. Now, go get your wounds treated. I shall hold the meeting at Sun-down." Spottedstar meowed, her ear flicking as she padded towards her den, gesturing for Sorrelspots to follow her.

Stormfall headed for the medicine cat den, passing by Sagepaw as

he entered.
The white apprentice had a few patches of herbs laid across her pelt, the worse being a rather large scratch along her shoulder.

"Thanks for helping me Stormfall, I've never fought anyone as tough as Cinderflame before! Are all ThunderClan cats that good?" Sagepaw meowed, pausing to look up at him.

"I'm not sure," Stormfall spoke, his voice low. "Perhaps. But Cinderflame was always the better fighter of our siblings."

He didn't want to say no and make his former clan seem weak, but to say yes was to imply that SkyClan would never be as strong. Cinderflame was an amazing fighter, that much was true, but she used moves he knew ThunderClan didn't teach.

"Stormfall, come here. I need to check your wounds." The light, gentle tone of Moonflower cut though the warrior's thoughts. Walking fully into the herb scented den, Stormfall blinked at the sight of the light brown medicine cat crouched over a pile of herbs finishing patching up Sandpaw's side.

"Just take a seat. I'll tend to you next." Moonflower instructed. "Sandpaw, you'll have to take it easy for the next few days. That was a nasty wound and I don't want to see it infected."

"I will Moonflower." Sandpaw promised gently, her tail tip flicking as she shot Stormfall a smirk. "You should've seen me. I chased away two warriors."

"Did you chase them away, or did they grow bored of fighting an overgrown mouse?" Stormfall teased, grinning at the look of outrage that crossed the shecat's face.

"Watch it, or I'll put fire ants in your nest." She warned playfully, sitting up as Moonflower moved to check Stormfall over.

"Do it. Then I'll be sure to tell Sorrelspots about how hurtful and mean her apprentice is." He grinned, enjoying the way the ginger shecat bantered with him.

"You arrogant kit." She admonished, her whiskers twitching in

amusement.

"Takes one to know one." Stormfall purred, wincing at the slight sting of Moonflower licking herbs into one of his cuts. "Thanks Moonflower, I feel better already."

The medicine cat beamed, touching his shoulder with her tail. "Thank you for being a good patient. Nettlefang and Sootwhisker act as if I'm putting briars in their nest if they have to take herbs!"

Sharing a grin, Sandpaw and Stormfall left the medicine den, pausing at the sight of the clan gathering. Gesturing for her companion to follow, Sandpaw weaved her way through the clan, taking a seat at the front beside Honeypool and Sootwhisker.

"Have you heard? Twigkit and Daisykit are becoming apprentices." Honeypool grinned, her blue eyes sparkling with excitement.

"Yeah, hopefully they get good mentors. Too bad I'm already mentoring Mousepaw, or I'd mentor one of Birdheart's kits." Sootwhisker boasted, causing Honeypool to snicker.

"Sure. We need more hotheaded fur balls." The tabby shecat teased, smiling as Sootwhisker rolled his eyes.

Stormfall opened his mouth tk comment, before the camp fell silent. Spottedstar sat on top of the massive Boulder in camp, her tail lifted for attention as she looked down at her clan.

"I have asked you to gather here to witness the naming of two apprentices. This is an especially important ceremony for SkyClan , as these kits will be the first since our creation to become apprentices. Daisykit, Twigkit, step forward." Spottedstar instructed, her eyes filled with pride and excitement.

The two kits stepped forward, Daisykit's eyes wide with excitement while Twigkit looked nervous. As they did, Stormfall couldn't help but knead the ground anxiously at the thought of training an apprentice of his own.

"Daisykit, from this day until you become a warrior of SkyClan you will be called Daisypaw. Honeypool, you are new to our clan, and

you have a determined and kind spirit that I hope you will pass along to Daisypaw." Spottedstar called, her eyes gleaming as she watched the two meet in the center of the clearing, Honeypool looking excited.
Beside him, Stormfall could see the look of pure pride on Sootwhisker's face as he watched the tabby warrior and her apprentice.

"Twigkit," the sound of Spottedstar continued drew his attention back to where the lone tomkit stood, his body stiff with worry. "You shall be known as Twigpaw from now until you earn your warrior name. I have chosen Stormfall to mentor you. Stormfall, you are a brave and fiercely loyal warrior, traits I hope you will encourage in Twigpaw."

Stepping forward, Stormfall couldn't help but smile gently at the small tom. Twigpaw looked excited but tense, his leaf colored eyes wide as he peered up at the taller warrior. Stormfall himself felt massive in comparison to the small tom, and a rush of protectiveness surfaced at the thought. "Don't worry, I promise we'll do great together." He assured him, purring at the way Twigpaw seemed to relax.

"Twigpaw! Daisypaw!" The clan chanted, the two apprentices beaming.
Stormfall chimed in, feeling his chest swell with pride as he peered around his clan. He met eyes with Spottedstar, the speckled shecat dipping her head warmly, her eyes full of approval.

Stormfall dipped his head back respectfully, his paws tingling with pride. '*This is where I belong.*'

Chapter sixteen

"You did well yesterday Cinderflame. I saw how fiercely you fought." Duskheart praised as he circled his apprentice, his tail flicking. "And no mercy to Stormfall? Very good."

The two were in the clearing where their training usually took place. Cinderflame flexed her shoulders, wincing at the faint sting. Stormfall hadn't fought back at all; but the white apprentice she had been fighting before her brother had shown up had quite the set of claws.

"I felt as if I was hurting myself. He's my brother." Cinderflame admitted, her ears pinned back to her head. "I know I shouldn't, but I feel guilty for it. I've never had to truly fight my own sibling."

"I understand. You were faced with a tough choice and in the end you chose your clan. You are a good warrior. Hollypaw is fortunate to have you mentoring her. I've noticed you and Rainbreeze seem closer now however." Duskheart spoke, his voice soothing. At his words, Cinderflame felt a rush of relief; he understood her misgivings about having fought her own littermate.

"Yeah. I think training Hollypaw and Jaypaw at the same time is helping. She's all I have left, except for my parents, Tigerfrost, you." Cinderflame spoke.

"It's almost dawn. I will let you rest tomorrow night. You've done me proud." Duskheart meowed. "That does remind me however; next time Hollypaw goes to catch a mouse, keep an eye on her left front leg. She seems to favor it."

"Thank you." Cinderflame meowed

As the silver tabby faded from the forest, a low chuckle was heard in the tree line. Stepping forward, a massive ginger tom smirked coldly at Duskheart who returned the expression.

"I've watched her sister in the day. Rainbreeze isn't as weak as we first

thought." The stranger spoke, his ear flicking. "She could do with the proper training, but she's coming along."

"It'll be a matter of time before our plans come to fruition. Go, Blazetail, train and be prepared. Our time is coming." Duskheart chuckled as his tail lashed.

"The end of the stars is near."

-

Yawning, the silver tabby stretched her back slowly, her eyes narrowing as she peered around the dimly lit den.
Next to her, Tigerfrost snored rather loudly, his paw flicking every so often. A few taillengths away, Cinderflame could see the heap of mottled ginger fur that made up Ashwind and Thornheart, and just beside them slept Tawnyfrost and Briarleap.

On her other side, Rainbreeze slept curled in a tight ball, her blue-grey fur sleek. Bramblestorm's light brown pelt was wrapped around her, their tails twined.

'*I wish she would finally admit that she loves him. It would save everyone more time.'* Cinderflame thought, her whiskers twitching as she rose from her nest to head outside.

Spiderclaw sat in the center of camp, his ear flicking as he watched Foxfang, Featherheart and Oakfur talk, their tails flicking restlessly. At the sight of Cinderflame, Spiderclaw perked up a bit. She liked the dark pelted warrior well enough; he was a fierce fighter and a rather easygoing tom, but he also had a thorn sharp tongue that could give out scathing remarks on an instant.

"Cinderflame, I want you to take Hollypaw, and Bramblestorm on a small hunting patrol this morning. Head over by the SkyClan border. If you see anything, don't engage, but send Hollypaw back here for me or Mudstar." Spiderclaw instructed, his ear flicking. "And while you're at it, wake up Rainbreeze. I want her checking the border by WindClan with Foxfang and Tawnyfrost. She can take Jaypaw along."

"Yes Spiderclaw." Cinderflame dipped her head politely to the clan

deputy before turning tail and slipping into the warriors den.

Making her way to the shared nest of her sister and the warrior who was obviously smitten with her, Cinderflame let out a soundless hiss at the thought of waking Bramblestorm up.

The normally brooding tom could be downright deadly when woken up, and Cinderflame was sure his dreams mirrored hers normally: rough, merciless training with a merciless and slightly insane dark cat named Cherryfang. Sighing, the silver tabby poked at the tom's side, jerking away as he hissed before lashing out, his pale green eyes hazy with sleep.

"Watch it!" She snapped lowly, mindful of the rest of the den sleeping. "You're on a hunting patrol with me and Hollypaw. And Rainbreeze is to go on a border patrol."

Bramblestorm grumbled lowly, his eyes narrowed. "Alright! We'll be out in a moment."

"You better." Cinderflame snapped as she turned and stalked out. She didn't like the tabby warrior, and hadn't since they were apprentices. What had added onto her dislike was the revelation that Bramblestorm was also training with a night-time mentor. She knew the tom was bad tempered enough, but she didn't want someone who was training to be ruthless and cruel anywhere near her sister.

'*And what about your brother?'* Cinderflame rolled her eyes at the intruding thought. No matter how much she cared for Stormfall, he had chosen to betray the clan, and her. And she didn't regret fighting him at the border either. Ever since then, her clanmates had been giving her approving looks, murmuring about her unwavering loyalty. Even her parents who had initially been worried about having to fight their only son were proud that she had defended the clan well.

She hadn't planned on fighting Stormfall at all, hoping to avoid the tom as she followed her clanmates into battle. But then that white SkyClan apprentice had attacked Hollypaw when Cinderflame sent her off to warn the camp, and suddenly she had felt rage pulse

through her at the sight of the older cat attacking her young apprentice. Briefly, she wondered if that was how Mistyrain had felt whenever Cinderflame had gotten in trouble.

The thought of her mentor made the silver warrior's paws veer into the direction of the nursery, where the Grey shecat had become a resident a few sunrises earlier. Peeking inside, she was met with the sight of Mistyrain curled up in a ball, her dark fur looking even more shadowy in the faint light. Across the den, Holly slept, her russet fur looking like a flame in the nursery.

Retreating quietly as to not wake either shecat, Cinderflame turned to wait for her fellow patrol-mates, her whiskers twitching at the sight of her apprentice pushing out of the apprentice den. Hollypaw's ginger fur was bristled, and as she stretched Cinderflame could see a few scraps of moss littered into the shecat's pelt.

"Cinderflame! What are we doing today? Battle training? Hunting?" The flame pelted apprentice meowed happily, her eyes bright and tail lashing in excitement.

Cinderflame purred warmly as she shook her head, her whiskers twitching. "You'll be going on a border patrol with me and Bramblestorm today." She meowed, her ear flicking. Her eyes shifted as another sleek ginger pelt emerged from the apprentice den. Jaypaw's fluffy pelt looked more disheveled than usual, and the tom slowly made his way closer till he reached his sister and her mentor.

"Can Jaypaw come with us?" Hollypaw questioned, her ear flicking backwards as she kneaded the ground.

"Sadly Jaypaw is to be on a different patrol. But later on I'll see if Rainbreeze wants to take you both hunting." Cinderflame promised, her nose touching Hollypaw's ear gently at the look of disappointment that flashed across the shecat's face.

"You're up." Rainbreeze greeted as she made her way towards her sister, Bramblestorm at her side. The two looked relaxed, with Bramblestorm's pale green eyes fixated on Rainbreeze adoringly.

"Spiderclaw has you, Foxfang and Tawnyfrost patrolling WindClan with Jaypaw. I'm taking Bramblestorm and Hollypaw." Cinderflame explained, nodding as their apprentices trotted over.

"Hey Rainbreeze, Bramblestorm." Jaypaw meowed, a yawn creeping into his voice as his nose twitched.

"I'll see you later?" Rainbreeze purred as she nudged Bramblestorm's cheek, the tom nodding with a warm look. The lanky warrior passed away, her apprentice at her side as she met up with her patrol.

"Ready?" Cinderflame questioned as she eyed Bramblestorm.

The tom nodded shortly, his eyes going back to the frosty pale green eyes. Cinderflame superseded a shiver as she turned, Hollypaw at her heels. The small patrol exited camp, padding towards the direction of the SkyClan border.

"Was it hard fighting SkyClan?" Hollypaw meowed curiously after a few moments, her ginger pelt shining like a flame as she moved. Cinderflame's whiskers twitched; when the battle had started, she had sent her apprentice back to camp to get reinforcements and warn the clan. Hollypaw hadn't been allowed to return to the fight afterwards.

"Not especially. They weren't as well trained as ThunderClan." Cinderflame meowed. "But then again: I'm pretty good at fighting." Her pelt prickled at the feeling of being stared at, and glancing back she could see Bramblestorm's cool gaze boring into her. His ear flicked back as he continued to steadily stare at her, his eyes narrowing a fraction.

"I can't wait to learn to fight, I'll be the best fighter in ThunderClan." Hollypaw bragged, her eyes gleaming.

"You shouldn't want to fight. It causes many wounds, and can be the reason some cats loose their friends and families. Fighting is the last resort." Bramblestorm grumbled, his deep voice harsh as he stalked behind them.

"But it's good to be eager to defend your clan." Cinderflame rushed, her eyes narrowing as she eyed the warrior. She didn't like his tone, not with her apprentice.

"I just want to keep everyone safe, Foxfang, Jaypaw, Holly, everyone." Hollypaw meowed.

"Is it strange being named after your mother?" Cinderflame redirected the conversation, her head tilting.

"A little? But not really. Especially now that I'm a 'paw." Hollypaw meowed, her paw steps slowing a little.

"Will Holly take a warrior name?" Bramblestorm meowed, his voice rumbling as he followed the two shecats.

"I don't know. Foxfang says she may not." Hollypaw shrugged, perking up at the sight of the border.

"I'll go re-mark it, sound alright?" Bramblestorm meowed as he passed Cinderflame, his voice low and his tone friendlier than before.

"Sounds good, Hollypaw, tell me what you can smell." Cinderflame nodded, flicking her tail as she turned to face her apprentice. The ginger shecat nodded as she sucked in a breath, her green eyes closing briefly.

"Rocks, a weird sandy smell, similar to WindClan but more...soil scented?" Hollypaw described the smell with a wrinkle of her nose, her eyes glancing up at Cinderflame.

"That's the scent of SkyClan. Remember it. It's not as marsh or pine filled as ShadowClan, and RiverClan smell more fishy. Every clan has their own scent and characteristics." Cinderflame explained, her tail flicking as she watched Hollypaw absorb the information. She was faintly aware of Bramblestorm making his way back to them, prompting the silver tabby warrior to stand up and stretch.

"Well, hello there." A soft voice spoke, causing the two ThunderClan shecats to turn with narrowed eyes and pinned ears. The voice's owner was revealed to be a small grey-brown tom, his green eyes

wide with curiosity. He couldn't have been more than a six moon old kit, his fur still fluff and barely any sign of sleekness to it.

"Who are you talking to Twigpaw, you know Stormfall-oh." A pale ginger shecat meowed as she pushed through the bushes behind the tom, her light green eyes narrowing at the sight of Cinderflame. '*That's Twigkit? Birdheart's son? That means Daisykit must be an apprentice as well. Is Stormfall his mentor?'*

Cinderflame's eyes narrowed as she took a small step forward to shield Hollypaw as the ginger shecat emerged fully. "Just marking the border." She meowed, her ear flicking as Bramblestorm moved to flank her other side.

"Sandpaw, Twigpaw, let's go." A shecat's sharp mew sounded, causing the two apprentices to share a glance before turning and leaving, not before the elder one, who Cinderflame now recognized as the pale ginger apprentice she had accused Stormfall of falling for, shot her a dark glare.

"Was that Sandpaw? And little Twigkit?" Bramblestorm murmured as the patrol watched the bushes for a few moments after the two apprentices left.

"Yes. And I believe it's Twigpaw now, or at least that's what she called him." Cinderflame meowed. "Should we hunt on the way back?"

"I would like to." Bramblestorm meowed, his head shaking as he turned. "And if I may-Hollypaw seems to be doing very well so far. She has a good nose. Maybe she'll be as good as of a tracker as Rainbreeze and Lightningtail are."

"Hopefully. But my sister seems to have a knack for tracking, and stealth. I had to work hard at it." Cinderflame purred at the thought, gesturing for her apprentice to follow them. "She and Stormfall used to tease me about being as loud as a herd of badgers!"

"I remember that." Bramblestorm chuckled. "Honeypool used to say that where Rainbreeze was as soft-pawed as the morning dewdrops,

you were the thunder before the storm."

Cinderflame laughed, her eyes rolling at the mention of their former clan mate.
"Please. I *was* the storm!"

chapter seventeen

Rainbreeze yawned as she re-entered the camp, Foxfang chattering excitedly with Jaypaw as the father and son padded alongside each other behind her. The blue-grey warrior felt a rush of affection fill her chest as she glanced back to look at her apprentice. Just behind the two ginger pelted toms, Tawnyfrost walked. The dark tabby shecat's copper eyes shifted around before she branched off from the patrol.

By the time the patrol had went to the WindClan border and back, Rainbreeze was sure Foxfang would've burst with pride. The older warrior was clearly impressed with his son, pride filling his light green eyes as he watched Rainbreeze have Jaypaw scent the area, and as the apprentice caught a mouse for the first time.

"Jaypaw, can you take some prey to Ravensight and Snowfall? Later on I'll see if Cinderflame and Hollypaw want to go to the sandy hollow to train." Rainbreeze instructed, watching as Jaypaw nodded before going to collect another mouse in addition to his own.

"You're a good mentor Rainbreeze. A far cry from when you were a kit who was shy of everyone." Foxfang murmured softly as he came to stand beside her. "While your siblings showcase their bold, blunt personalities well, you remind me of your uncle, Lightningtail. Both of you are more quiet and easy-going."

"My father says the same thing." Rainbreeze purred, her eyes traveling the camp before fixing on her parents, the two warriors sharing prey alongside Mudstar and Nightmist. Foxfang touched her shoulder gently, his tail flicking away as he made his way towards the nursery where Holly sat, her dark ginger pelt gleaming as she spoke happily with Mistyrain, the newest addition to the den. The ginger warrior nuzzled his mate gently, taking a seat with the two queens.

Rainbreeze sighed as she looked around, a sharp ache filling her chest as she shuffled her paws. '*Stormfall is gone.*'

The thought always made her ache. Her brother, the one who had always been there to oversee Cinderflame and her with a sharp amber eye, was gone. She knew he was probably happier but it didn't make her miss him any less. Shaking herself off, Rainbreeze glanced around, her eyes pausing as she caught sight of Tawnyfrost and Owlflame sitting together, their tails rained as they murmured back and forth.

Padding over to the two older warriors, Rainbreeze meowed out a greeting, coming to sit across from them. "How have you been Owlflame?"

"Bored now that I don't have to train you." Owlflame admitted, his yellow eyes gleaming playfully. "But I find things tk help. I am glad that Mudstar gave you an apprentice so soon, although *some cats* are a bit jealous."

"Hush." Tawnyfrost retorted, her tail flicking his ear as she rolled her dark copper eyes. The tall tabby shecat stretched, her eyes closing briefly. "But I am happy for you Rainbreeze. Jaypaw seems really fun to mentor."

"He is. He's so easygoing and relaxed, I don't envy Cinderflame, Hollypaw seems extremely hyper." Rainbreeze purred lightly as she mentioned her sister's apprentice; the ginger shecat seemed lively and overly eager in comparison to her brother.

"Much like Cinderflame them. Hopefully Mudstar will let me mentor one of Mistyrain's kits." Tawnyfrost meowed warmly, her eyes gleaming.

"You'd be a good mentor. Larktail and Sagefern both tell me how good of a hunter you are, and how beautiful."'Owlflame purred.

"Larktail and Sagefern have more time on their paws then needed if they're trying to set me up with such a grumpy, argumentative tom." Tawnyfrost sniffed, her copper eyes full of amusement as Owlflame scoffed.

"Who are you calling grumpy, you're just a cheeky kit." Owlflame teased, his whiskers twitching as Tawnyfrost batted at him

playfully, the two soon trading playful retorts back and forth as Rainbreeze watched.

"Hey." The deep voice of her own mate made Rainbreeze's tail twitch, and glancing over her shoulder she was met with the warm green gaze of the older tom. A rush of affection began to fill her chest, the warmth in Bramblestorm's eyes feeling as comforting and enjoyable as the newleaf sun.

"Hey, how was the patrol?" She meowed, shifting to face him directly, Tawnyfrost and Owlflame still bickering playfully.

"Pretty good. Although I forgot how bossy your sister can be." Bramblestorm chuckled. "We saw Twigkit, or Twig*paw* now, and Sandpaw."

"You did? Who's mentoring Twigpaw?" Rainbreeze meowed, her whiskers twitching at his comment on Cinderflame; the silver tabby could be very bossy at times.

"I think Stormfall is. At least, that's what Sandpaw hinted at before they left." Bramblestorm answered as he stretched. "That Hollypaw sure is energetic."

Rainbreeze chuckled, her spirits lifting more. "Yeah, Jaypaw is so easygoing in comparison." '*So Stormfall has an apprentice? That must mean he's being accepted there'* she thought, her earlier anxiety for her brother easing up.

"He seems to be a calm apprentice. I saw him taking some prey to the medicine cat den." Bramblestorm meowed, his eyes glancing around the camp. "I think Spiderclaw may want me to lead a hunting patrol soon, want to join me?"

"I can't. I told Jaypaw I'd take him to the sandy hollow and that I'd see if Cinderflame and Hollypaw want to go as well." Rainbreeze commented, her ear flicking. "But maybe later on we can go hunting? Just the two of us?"

"If you can keep up with me." Bramblestorm teased, his tail flicking her ear playfully as he walked past.

Watching him head towards where the clan deputy gathered, Rainbreeze smiled softly. She felt blessed by StarClan; she had a wonderful mate who truly made her feel like the happiest cat by the lake, she had a eager and kind apprentice, a good relationship with her sister, and her clan was well fed and happy.

"When can I be expecting grandkits?" The sweet, honeyed voice of her mother broke through Rainbreeze's thoughts, moments before the senior warrior settled down beside her daughter.

"Not for a while longer." Rainbreeze purred as she looked at her mother. "I still have to train Jaypaw."

"I'm teasing. You look happy today, how was your patrol?" Skyfeather meowed, her pale blue eyes, so much like Rainbreeze's own, full of amusement and love.

"Pretty good. Jaypaw caught his first mouse, and Foxfang spent the rest of the patrol bragging about it." Rainbreeze grinned, her head shaking. "Was Thistlefang as bad as he is when me, Cinderflame and Stormfall were apprentices?"

"Oh worse. When Cinderflame managed to perfect her hunting crouch as a 'kit, he was talking about it for ages. When you three became apprentices and he heard of your individual talents, he chattered told everyone in our clan and others about how his kits were going to be the best warriors." Skyfeather purred. "He really loved how much you three were like himself and your uncles."

"Everyone says that. They say Cinderflame is every bit as hotheaded as Thistlefang was, that Sparrowstrike and Stormfall are a lot alike and that I'm like Lightningtail." Rainbreeze sighed. "I sometimes feel like I'm just a copy to most of them."

"Well you're not. And perhaps that's how Stormfall felt growing up. I always thought naming him after my father would bring him good luck, but maybe doing so made him feel as if he was being made to live up to another cat's legacy. You are you, my strong, beautiful, gentle daughter. Yes you may show the same promise in tracking that Lightningtail has, but at the end of every day, you are not him. Just as Cinderflame is not your father, no matter how well of a

fighter she becomes." Skyfeather spoke, her voice fierce as she looked at her kit.

Her words seemed to circle around Rainbreeze's head, the phrase 'living up to another cat's legacy' in particular. Is that what Stormfall had truly felt? As if he was nothing more than someone else's copy? *No wonder he wanted to leave, she would too if she had been named for a cat that everyone else seemed to idolize.*

"You're right." Rainbreeze meowed finally, her ear flicking back. "I'm my own cat. I'm gonna go fetch Jaypaw, I'll see you later." With a gentle nuzzle, Rainbreeze left her mother's side. Padding towards the fresh-kill pile, Rainbreeze gestured for her apprentice to join her. "Meet me by the camp entrance, I'm gonna see if Cinderflame and Hollypaw would like to join us."

"Okay!" Jaypaw grinned.

Turning, Rainbreeze hurried towards the silvery form of her sister, Cinderflame's tabby pelt shining dimly as she exited the warriors den, Tigerfrost behind her.

"Hey Rainbreeze." The black furred tom meowed brightly, his blue eyes warm and his tail flicking happily. "What's the hurry?"

She likes Tigerfrost well enough: the tom was easygoing and well-liked amongst the clan. She didn't care for the way he had initially started to treat Cinderflame towards the end of their journey, but the two seemed to have made up.

"Just seeing if my dearest sister would like to come train our apprentices together?" Rainbreeze meowed, her head tilting as she looked at Cinderflame. Although taller, Rainbreeze felt as small as a kit in comparison to Cinderflame's well muscles body. Rainbreeze couldn't help but notice that her sister's silver pelt had a few more scratches along it, and that the already tough shecat seemed to have more of a muscular build along her legs, unlike Rainbreeze's lankier limbs.

"Of course. I'll grab Hollypaw and meet you at the camp entrance." Cinderflame responded, her golden eyes full of excitement. "Sound

alright?"

"Sure." Rainbreeze spoke, her paws itching to get to the training hollow. Turning around, she made her way to where Jaypaw sat at the entrance, his ginger fur groomed neatly.

"Are they coming?" The tomcat meowed, his head tilting curiously at the excited look on his mentor's face.

"Cinderflame is going to get Hollypaw now." Rainbreeze meowed, her whiskers twitching as Jaypaw looked pleased, his ginger tail flicking back and forth.

"I can't wait to get to the training hollow! Lionpaw and Hawkpaw both say it's great!" Hollypaw chirped as she padded up, Cinderflame trailing behind her.

"Hawkpaw also says that you talk too much. Lionpaw just moons over you." Jaypaw teased, his blue eyes gleaming at the embarrassed shove his sibling gave him.

"Lionpaw huh? He's a very nice tom." Rainbreeze interrupted playfully, her eyes shifting to meet Cinderflame's amused look.

"He's okay." Hollypaw mumbled, her ears flattening against her head. "At least he's not like Jaypaw. You and Petalpaw are always *flirting*."

"Petalpaw is sweet." Jaypaw meowed simply, his shoulders shrugging carelessly.

"You know, when we were apprentices, we had crushes too." Cinderflame spoke up. Mine was on Tigerfrost, and Rainbreeze had one on Bramblestorm."

"Really? Bramblestorm seems so grumpy though!" Hollypaw meowed, her eyes wide with surprise as she looked at Rainbreeze.

"He can be. But he's mainly just quiet. He prefers things to run smoothly and easily, while Tigerfrost likes to joke around." Rainbreeze supplied, pausing as they reached the training area.

"Alright, let's get ready." Cinderflame meowed, her ear flicking backwards. "Hollypaw, Jaypaw, move to the side while Rainbreeze and I demonstrate. I think we'll start with a nice paw swipe. It'll require you to be very swift, strong and sure."

"Exactly. But remember, claws sheathed, we train like that to keep ourselves safe." Rainbreeze reminded the apprentices before turning to face her sister directly. "Offense or defense?"

"You come at me, I'll block as you go in fro the swipe?" Cinderflame suggested, her tail flicking as she crouched, her ears pinned to her head.

"Sure." Rainbreeze spoke, watching as their apprentices sat down before she mimicked her sister, crouching down low. She waited for the slight nod Cinderflame sent her way, lunging as the silver warrior blocked her attacks.

Raising a paw, Rainbreeze swiped at her sister carefully, her paw flashing out smoothly and quickly.

Ducking, Cinderflame let out a faint hiss before she sprang backwards, her silver tabby tail lashing as she turned to look at Hollypaw and Jaypaw. "Now your turn!"

chapter eighteen

"Twigpaw, hurry up!" Stormfall ordered, wincing as he watched Twigpaw clumsily pin down Daisypaw, the two apprentices tussling before breaking apart. "You'll never pin a ShadowClan warrior if you always wait for them to strike first."

"Stormfall, take it easy. They're learning." Honeypool chastised him gently, her pale blue eyes filled with amusement. Ever since they had transferred to SkyClan, the two former ThunderClan cats had become as close as littermates, each missing their respective siblings. Stormfall appreciated Honeypool's personality: the older shecat was as gentle and kind as Rainbreeze, but could be as sharp and fierce as Cinderflame.

"I just want him to be the best." Stormfall sighed. "I want my first apprentice to be great."

"He will be. Just watch. Twigpaw is naturally lean, so maybe focus more on his speed and accuracy? Brute strength won't work as well for him. Daisypaw isn't very fast, but she's perceptive." Honeypool suggested. "Remember how Pinefur was when he trained you?"

"Yeah, he was pretty good." Stormfall nodded. He missed his former mentor; Pinefur had always been there, funny, always laughing and causing mischief. He was very much like an older brother to Stormfall. "Alright, let's try that half-turn again!"

-

"Go ahead get yourself something to eat." Honeypool instructed the two apprentices as they entered camp, touching Stormfall's shoulder with her tail tip. "I'll see you later."

"Alright." He meowed, watching as the brown tabby made her way towards her mate, Sootwhisker, the two nudging each other as they sat down outside of the rocky den that made up the warriors den.

"Hey, guess who's becoming a warrior today?" Sandpaw purred as she padded up to Stormfall, her leaf-green eyes full of excitement. Stormfall could t help but smile at the shecat's obvious excitement, his eyes rolling playfully.

"Who, Twigpaw?" He questioned sarcastically, ducking as she playfully swiped a paw at his ears.

"No bird-brain, me!" She laughed. "Sorrelspots is talking to Spottedstar about making me, Sagepaw, Leafpaw and Mousepaw warriors."

"I know it's you. You deserve it Sandpaw, you've trained hard." Stormfall meowed, his whiskers twitching in amusement.

"Will you be there?" She asked softly, her features serious and hopeful. Stormfall felt a jolt of affection for the smaller shecat: he truly did enjoy her company and soon he'd be able to spend more time with her.

"Of course. I'll be right in the front row, cheering you on the loudest." He promised.

—

The clan gathered a bit before sun-high, their focus on Spottedstar as the speckled shecat jumped onto the large branch of the sun-tree that made up her den and her announcement place.

Sitting in a row in front of the tree were the four apprentices. Sandpaw looked nervously excited, her pale ginger paws kneading the ground as she shifted her weight. Leafpaw and Mousepaw, both looking extremely large and extremely small next to each other, shared excited looks while Sagepaw sat still, her ta tip flicking back and forth.

Settling more into his spot at the front of the crowd, Stormfall was aware of Sootwhisker, Sparkfire and Honeypool taking their seats beside him. "Hey."

"Sandpaw looked like she's ready to burst." Sparkfire purred as he

nodded towards the ginger shecat. "They deserved this."

"Yes they did." Honeypool grinned as she nudged Stormfall. "Soon it'll be Twigpaw and Daisypaw."

"Hopefully not too son." Stormfall chuckled, quieting down as Spottedstar raised her tail for attention.

"Cats of SkyClan, I have called you all here today to witness the naming of new warriors. As a new clan, we make warriors who in turn hunt for us, fight for us, teach our young. It is my privilege and my honor to be able name these apprentices today." She began, her eyes bright as she turned to look at the cats in front of her.

She began with Sandpaw, her whiskers twitching as the shecat stood up even straighter, "Sandpaw, I have heard from several of our clanmates about how well you have done in your training. We traveled to the lake together, and not once did I hear an unkind word from you. You are filled with boundless energy, unmatched determination, and a kind heart. I spoke with Sorrelspots and she agrees with me as well." Spottedstar purred warmly as she continued. "In honor of the way our clan has soared in terms of being new to the lake, I hail uou by your new name. From this day forward, you will be known as Sandfeather."

"Sandfeather! Sandfeather!" The clan changed, Stormfall raising his voice as pride filled his chest. Sandfeather looked beyond proud, her leaf colored eyes full of happiness. She glanced over her shoulder at him, her smile wide.

Spottedstar continued to speak after the chanting died down, her eyes shifting g to her own apprentice. Leafpaw looked excited, his muscular frame tense.
"Leafpaw, you have shown yourself to be a strong and formidable young tom, with a kind heart. I believe I have done well in teaching you the ways of a warrior, and you have been a pleasure to mentor. In honor of this and your bravery, I name you Leafdawn."

"Leafdawn! Leafdawn!" The clan chanted proudly, the new warrior's chest puffed up proudly.

"Mousepaw, from a quiet apprentice who often stayed in the shadows, you have grown to be not only be silent but deadly in your focus. Sootwhisker has done very well in mentoring you to the fullest of his ability. In honor of this drive and your never ending energy, I name you Mouseleap." Spottedstar continued, purring as the small grey warrior grinned happily.

'*He's a good cat, and that name is perfect for him.'* Stormfall thought, nodding as he chanted the new warrior's name. Mouseleap was very energetic and determined; he often was the apprentice who was always ready to train no matter what time.

"Sagepaw, I have watched you become a dedicated hunter and a kind member of this clan. Nettlefang has spoken at length of your kindness and openness to listen to all of your clan members' problems. From this day forward, you will be known as Sageheart." Spottedstar spoke, her tail tip flicking at the last apprentice.

Sageheart purred, her white tail curling in excitement as she traded excited looks with Sandfeather.

"And that concludes our meeting. Tonight our new warriors will sit vigil and guard us." Spottedstar called. "Dismissed!"

"I could hear you above everyone else." Sandfeather meowed teasingly as she approached Stormfall, her ear flicking. "Loudmouth."

"Watch it, you may be a warrior now, but I could still make you clean the elders' den." Stormfall grumbled, his whiskers twitching as he eyed her.

"Oh really? And make me spend time with Russetsky? However will I survive?" Sandfeather sassed, her eyes rolling playfully.

"Hey," the deep voice of Sootwhisker sounded behind the two, amusement clear. Turning his head, Stormfall felt his pelt heat up in embarrassment at the sight of Sootwhisker and Honeypool standing there watching them with amused looks.

"Hey." Sandfeather meowed, her ear flicking as she sat down beside

Stormfall.

"Congrats Sandfeather, bout time you joined us in the warriors den." Honeypool meowed warmly. "We've all been excitedly waiting for you. Especially some of us." She grinned, her yellow eyes glancing briefly at Stormfall.

'*Shut up Honeypool!'* He thought, his paws shuffling awkwardly as Sootwhisker chuckled and Sandfeather licked her chest fur in embarrassment. He had been excited for Sandfeather to join them in the warriors den; she was funny, and had a way of making him feel free in a way no other cat had.

"Well, I heard Sorrelspots and Spottedstar speaking about who to take to the gathering tonight. Hopefully you get to go Sandfeather." Honeypool meowed, her ear flicking. "My first gathering as a warrior was incredible. Of course, Bramblestorm and Tigerfrost were so loud that it was slightly embarrassing, but it's an amazing experience."

"I think Spottedstar is going to announce who's going." Sootwhisker interrupted gently, touching Honeypool's side with his tail as the four turned their heads to watch as Spottedstar and Sorrelspots stood below the Sun-Tree.

"I have decided that attending the gathering tonight will be myself, Sorrelspots, Stormfall, Moonflower, Honeypool, Sootwhisker, Daisypaw, Twigpaw, Russetsky, and Nettlefang. The rest of the clan will remain here, and our newest warriors will sit vigil in our absence. Thank you." She announced, before turning to speak to Sorrelspots and Moonflower.

"Well, next moon then." Sandfeather sighed before perking up. "But don't worry; I'll keep an eye on camp. After all, I am the better warrior."

"You cheeky kit." Stormfall snorted as he shoved her playfully, the two sharing grins.

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"...nothing else to report," Thornstar called, his golden pelt freshly groomed as he peered down into the clearing. "Mudstar?"

The ThunderClan leader stepped forward, his dark pelt rippling over his muscular frame. Looking around, Stormfall caught sight of several of his former clanmates, before his eyes locked on the sight of his sisters sitting a fox-length away, Tigerfrost and Bramblestorm flanking them.

Rainbreeze looked happy, her head tipped back as she laughed at something Bramblestorm whispered to her, their tails curled around each other. Cinderflame looked excited, her and Tigerfrost leaning into each other as they whispered back and forth. Stormfall shuffled his paws, glancing to his other side at Honeypool and Sootwhisker. '*My friends still care about me.*'

"I am glad to announce that two of our kits have become apprentices. Hollykit and Jaykit are now Hollypaw and Jaypaw. Rainbreeze is mentoring Jaypaw, and Cinderflame is mentoring Hollypaw. I am also pleased to announce that one of our warriors, Mistyrain, has moved to the nursery expecting Falconstrike's kits." Mudstar announced, his green eyes full of pride. Stormfall called his congrats for his sisters and for Mistyrain; he had always appreciated the grey warrior's gentle nature and sweet words.

"I'll go next?" Spottedstar spoke, glancing at Rainstar slightly. At the speckled RiverClan leader's nod, she continued.
"SkyClan is thriving well, and we are pleased to announce several new warriors; Sandfeather, Leafdawn, Mouseleap and Sageheart, as well as the apprenticeship of Daisykit and Twigkit, who are mentored by Honeypool and Stormfall." As she finIhed, Stormfall felt the heat of many of the clans' eyes on his pelt. He was sure most of them were curious on why he had transferred clans. "Thank you." Spottedstar finished as she stepped back.

Rainstar stepped forward, her eyes tired. Stormfall could see how matted the leader's pelt was, and with a shudder he noticed her hunched frame.
"RiverClan is stronger than ever. Nothing else to report." She rasped.

"I think we can all spare some time to visit." Newtstar called out, his eyes fixated on Rainstar worriedly.

"I agree." Spottedstar meowed, Thornstar and Mudstar nodding as well.

"Cmon." Honeypool spoke, leading Stormfall and Sootwhisker towards where her brother sat. Stormfall trailed after his clanmates as he neared his sisters, faltering as Cinderflame fixed him with a hard look, her copper eyes blank. Rainbreeze however, looked excited, her blue eyes warm and her tail waving as she stood to meet him.

"Hey! How are you? How is Sandfeather?" She meowed, her voice friendly. Beside her, Bramblestorm dipped his head politely to Sootwhisker before giving Honeypool an affectionate nudge.

"I-I'm well. Sandfeather is as well, she's doing her vigil. How are you? And how is training Jaypaw, was it?" He stammered, shifting his weight.

"I'm great! He's a wonderful apprentice, very kind-hearted and focused. I think he'll make a good hunter. Hollypaw is definitely the more energetic one." She purred. "How about your apprentice? I can't believe little Twig and Daisy are apprentices."

"They're great. Twigpaw is determined, but I feel he's a bit shy." Stormfall admitted. "I worry I push him too hard."

"Just remember, he may be intimidated by you. Just be patient and open-minded." Rainbreeze advised.

"So you really do like living in a rocky cliff?" The cool voice of Cinderflame sounded, Stormfall's body tensing as he looked at her directly. She looked apathetic, her face blank.

"Yeah. Yeah I do. I feel like I finally belong somewhere." He spoke, his voice low. "I feel happy."

"Well that's good. Traitors deserve happiness at some point." Cinderflame remarked coldly.

Stormfall began to respond, stopping as Spottedstar called for SkyClan to gather.

"Run along, traitor." Cinderflame spoke softly, her eyes narrowed into slits.

'*Will she ever forgive me?*' Stormfall thought as he made his way after his clanmates, his tail dragging slightly. '*Or have I lost my sister forever?*'

chapter nineteen

"Again!"

Cinderflame's teeth gritted together as she lunged at Duskheart, ducking beneath his outstretched claws to jab at his belly, rolling away as he grunted. Standing up, the silver warrior hissed as she raked her claws down his side, her tail tucked tightly as she leapt over his head.

"Good. How was the gathering?" Duskheart spoke, his voice raspy as he took a seat. Cinderflame mirrored him; she was glad to see that the normally mercilessly energetic tom looked out of breath for once.

"Good. The other clans seem okay, Stormfall was made a mentor as well." Her lip curled distastefully. She couldn't understand how Rainbreeze could so easily forgive their brother; he had betrayed not only ThunderClan, but them as well. "Traitorous fool."

"SkyClan accepts kittypets and traitors, and that makes them weak." Duskheart scoffed, "However, you are doing well with training Hollypaw. Your sister is doing a fine job with Jaypaw as well. I'll admit, I thought Rainbreeze was too soft of an apprentice to ever become a warrior. But I think she is a fine one now."

"I think Bramblestorm helps. He makes her more confident, more sure." Cinderflame spoke, meeting Duskheart's eyes.

"Bramblestorm was promising when he trained here. Now that he's gone, I see he's devoting his talent to hunting for elders and kits." He scoffed, his eyes rolling before he fixated them back onto her. "It's almost dawn. I'll visit you again tonight."

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Cinderflame yawned as she woke up, her eyes blinking slowly. Stretching her legs out further, the silver warrior began to sit up. Looking around the den tiredly, Cinderflame moved to lean over Rainbreeze's nest.

The blueish gray shecat slept soundly, the area that was usually occupied by her bad tempered mate was empty: his scent faint. '*He's probably on a patrol. Same with Tigerfrost and Tawnyfrost.*' Cinderflame thought, poking her sister's side with a paw. As she did, Cinderflame noted how Rainbreeze's usually lean frame was a bit plump, her stomach a bit more round then usual.

"Cinderflame?" Rainbreeze mumbled as she peeked a light blue eye open. She sounded groggy, her voice muffled as she began to wake slowly. "What's going on?"

"Why don't we go hunting? Just you and me. I can have Jaypaw and Hollypaw tend to the elders, nursery and help Snowfall and Ravensight." Cinderflame spoke softly, her hopes lifting as Rainbreeze yawned, her head lifting out of her nest.

"That sounds fun. If you want to go ahead and inform them, I'll meet you by the camp entrance?" Rainbreeze suggested, turning her head to groom herself quickly.

"Yeah." Cinderflame agreed, standing and leaving the den. As she made her way across the the apprentice den, she caught sight of her mother and father sitting outside of the elders' den, their tails twined as they spoke with Mossheart. The old elder looked happy, his mottled tail flicking ever so often. '*I bet he misses Willowstep and Lionclaw.*'

"Jaypaw, Hollypaw?" Cinderflame called as she dipped her head to look inside of the apprentice den.
Inside lay a snoring Lionpaw, one of his dark paws flicking at the air as he slept on his back. A few nests lay scattered around the den, the absence of Petalpaw and Hawkpaw suggested the two were out with their mentors. On the back wall, Jaypaw and Hollypaw sat speaking quietly, pausing their conversation as they turned to look at her expectedly.

"Yes Cinderflame?" Hollypaw meowed, her ears pricked forward excitedly. Jaypaw mirrored his sister's excited expression, both of them padding towards her.

"I'm going to have you both clean up the elders' den, the nursery,

and then go help Snowfall and Ravensight with whatever tasks they have. I'm going hunting with Rainbreeze." She spoke. "Alright?"

"Yes. We can do that, Mossheart may even tell us stories if we go now." Hollypaw meowed, her eyes bright with excitement as she turned to face her brother, the two apprentices hurrying towards the elders' den.

"I see you have them already put to work." The soft voice of Lightningtail spoke from her other side, Cinderflame's head turning to meet her uncle's eyes.

"Yeah, they're certainly eager." She meowed.

"Just as your father was as an apprentice." He chuckled. "It was no surprise to any of us that he and Skyfeather were the two most competitive apprentices in the den. We all thought they would claw each others' ears off before they would admit defeat."

"Really? They always seem so in tune." Cinderflame meowed, surprise filling her as she looked across the camp, watching as her parents laughed.

"Not always. They had a lot of spats before they began to grow closer. Then your mother found out that she and her siblings were half-RiverClan ."Lightningtail meowed, his ear flicking backwards.

"Wait, she is? Does that mean me, Stormfall and Rainbreeze are as well?" Cinderflame spoke.

"Yes. You three have ties to RiverClan, ThunderClan and SkyClan now. But a lot of the cats in the clans have mixed blood. Mudstar has WindClan blood, Ravensight and Falconstrike as well, Mistyrain was originally from RiverClan. All of the clans have their blood mixed." Lightningtail shrugged. "My own mother would tell me and my brothers of how we were descended from an ancient lost clan, which has now been revealed to be SkyClan. So I guess you and your littermates have ties to all three."

"Oh," Cinderflame murmured, her tail flicking thoughtfully, "I better go, I'm supposed to meet Rainbreeze."

At the nod from her uncle, Cinderflame made her way across the camp towards the entrance, relieved to see her littermate waiting patiently. '*So all three of us are results of half-clan mating?'*

She could see it: Stormfall had always had a more muscular and tall build, his hind legs extremely strong. Rainbreeze had always been taller with soft fur, much like a RiverClan cat. Looking at her sister, Cinderflame could see the resemblance between her sister's eyes and the eyes of RiverClan-born Mistyrain's.

"You ready?" Rainbreeze meowed, her eyes warm. "I want to get out of camp."

"Yeah, can we hunt by the RiverClan border maybe?" Cinderflame requested. "I don't think the other patrols have hunted by there all morning."

"Good idea." Rainbreeze meowed, touching her sister's shoulder as she led her out of camp.

Cinderflame and Rainbreeze chatted aimlessly as they continued on, pausing every few minutes as one of them would catch scent of a squirrel or the odd mouse. A few times they had caught flashes of a tabby tail or a streak of white fur, which they brushed off as they continued.

By the time they had reached the RiverClan border, Cinderflame noticed that Rainbreeze was slightly out of breath. The blue tinted warrior looked a bit wore out; her paws dragging a slight second.

"You alright? You normally would be bursting with energy." Cinderflame joked, her head tilting as Rainbreeze crouched to take a drink.

"Yes..it's just, well.." Rainbreeze hesitated, her eyes flickering from her paws to Cinderflame worriedly. "I'm expecting Bramblestorm's kits. We found out last night from Ravensight."

"Oh my stars.." Cinderflame meowed lowly as she stared at her sister. '*No wonder her stomach was starting to round!' "*And Ravensight is sure?"

"Yes. Aren't you pleased?" Rainbreeze meowed, her ears pinned to her head as she looked at Cinderflame.

"Immensely! Just surprised, we haven't been warriors for long. But that's wonderful news!" Cinderflame assured her hurriedly, touching her muzzle to Rainbreeze's gently. "Does our parents know? How did Bramblestorm react?"

"We haven't said anything. But he's beyond excited. He started in immediately about me moving to the nursery, but I have Jaypaw to think about." Rainbreeze sighed "I don't want his training to suffer."

"What about Tigerfrost? He could take over Jaypaw's training for you; he's just as easygoing and relaxed so it shouldn't be too much of a change." Cinderflame suggested as she sat closer to her sister, eyeing her as Rainbreeze hummed thoughtfully.

"I think that would work!" Rainbreeze purred loudly. "I'm so glad you know: you were the first person I wanted to tell."

Cinderflame felt her heart ache wjth love for her sister. Despite how different they were, she had wanted Cinderflame to know the good news before anyone else. "We better get you back to camp. I don't want anything to happen to you or my unborn nieces or nephews." The silver warrior purred before standing, ushering Rainbreeze back towards camp.

"And I'm going to fetch you the best piece of prey in camp!"

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"Lionpaw, Hawkpaw and Petalpaw, please step forward." Mudstar called from his perch on the tall rock, his green eyes gleaming proudly.

Cinderflame smiled as she watched her former den mates step forward; Hawkpaw looked determined, Petalpaw looked nervous and Lionpaw hurried forward, his grey and black pelt bristling in excitement.

"Petalpaw, you have grown to be a fierce hunter and a capable apprentice. I wish your siblings could have been alongside you

earning your names together. But i know they are watching you from StarClan's hunting grounds. From this day forward, you will be known as Petalfrost." Mudstar spoke, peering down at the shecat warmly.

"Petalfrost!" Cinderflame called out amongst her clanmates, a feeling of bittersweet happiness welling up in her chest. '*Breezepaw and Hazelpaw should've been up there as well.*'

Mudstar waited till the cheers died down before turning his gaze into Lionpaw. His whiskers twitched as Lionpaw stiffened, his eyes wide.

"Lionpaw, you are boisterous, open minded and known by most all of the clans for being one of the most optimistic and genuinely friendly apprentices in the clan. Due to your warm nature, we have found many a laugh in the hardest of times. In now rename you Liontail." The leader called, warmth and affection clear as he looked at the young apprentice.

Cinderflame cheered for her friend, sharing a happy look with her sister. Rainbreeze sat beside her, Bramblestorm pressed against her other side. The two looked content, the tabby warrior's tail curled around Rainbreeze protectively.
On Cinderflame's other side, Tigerfrost sat close by, his voice loud and his eyes warm.

'*I really love him.*' Cinderflame thought. She had known when they first returned from the trip, but now, seeing the pride and warmth radiating from the tom, she couldn't help but reaffirm it. As she watched the tom laugh, she briefly wondered whether or not he would be a good father. An image of him, laughing and playing as lord spilled over his sides filled her head. A small tomkit with her silver fur and his dark blue eyes, a shekit with his dark tabby fur and her copper colored gaze. Both of the kits as strong and sturdy as their father, but with her swiftness. '*Duskheart would train them.*' The thought whispered across her fantasy, her shoulders stiffening. She frowned, suddenly hating the idea of her dark mentor training her kits as ruthlessly as he did her.

"And Hawkpaw. You are often quiet and resourceful, but still fierce

and protective. I name your Hawkwhisker. Continue to prove to the clan exactly what makes a true warrior." Mudstar meowed, his eyes gleaming as he called the new warriors names, echoed by the clan. "Petalfrost! Liontail! Hawkwhisker!"

As the cheers faded, Mudstar cleared his throat loudly, his tail flicking to gesture Rainbreeze and Bramblestorm over.

"With the naming of new warriors, comes the newness of life. Rainbreeze has informed me that she and Bramblestorm are expecting kits. As we all know, this leaves Jaypaw without a mentor. Rainbreeze has made a suggestion, and upon further thought I agree with her choice. Jaypaw, please step forward."

The ginger tom moved forward slowly, his blue eyes fixed on Rainbreeze who smiled encouragingly.

"Tigerfrost," Mudstar called as the apprentice stood in front of the clan. "Step forward."

Tigerfrost's eyes were wide, the dark blue depths swimming with confusion and surlrise. "M-me?" He coughed, his tail flicking.

"I know you'll train Jaypaw and make him as great of a warrior as anyone else." Rainbreeze spoke up, her blue eyes soft. "If you'll accept that is."

"Of course I will. Thank you Rainbreeze." Tigerfrost meowed as he moved to stand in front of Jaypaw. "I promise I'll be just as good of a mentor as Rainbreeze is."

Jaypaw nodded shyly, both toms looking up at Mudstar.

"Then it's settled. From now until he has earned his warrior name, Tigerfrost will mentor Jaypaw to the best of his abilities." Mudstar meowed, his tail flicking. "I have one more ceremony to preform."

'*Who else could be needing a ceremony?'* The question seemed to be echoed on Rainbreeze, Bramblestorm, and many others' faces as Cinderflame glanced around. Her eyes traveled the camp until they fixated on Holly, who stepped forward away from Foxfang and the nursery.

"Holly has voiced her wish to adopt a clan name, as she has decided to fully join us," Mudstar announced, pausing to let the chatters that had began at his words die down. "And so I say these words in front of our ancestors so they may hear and welcome our new member in her tkme. Holly, do you swear to uphold the warrior code and protect the clan, even at the cost of your life?"

Cinderflame could see the determined glint in the former rogue's eyes; her head nodding firmly as she answered verbally. A sense of excitement and pride filled the silver shecat; she was gaining yet another new clan mate.

"Then from this day forward, i name you Roseblossom." Mudstar announced. "Welcome to ThunderClan."

"Roseblossom!" The clan cheered, Cinderflame joining in.

'*I wish my brother was here.*' Cinderflame thought as she looked around. '*I wish he was here.*'

chapter twenty

It had been a moon since Rainbreeze had moved into the nursery and the blue-grey shecat was more than ready to have her kits.

In that span of time, Mistyrain had given birth to two toms, Creekkit and Rockkit, and Featherheart has moved into the nursery expecting Thornheart's kits. The nursery was full, and soon would have more residents, if the adoring looks Liontail often have to Hollypaw and the sweet smiles shared between Jaypaw and Petalheart were anything to go by. Even Hawkwhisker, his personality cool and his voice soft, had been spending more and more time with Blossomtail.

She missed training Jaypaw, but she knew Tigerfrost had been the best choice. The good mannered warrior and her former apprentice got along well, and Jaypaw had made it a point to visit her to tell her about his training as often as he could. It warmed Rainbreeze's heart to know that her first apprentice missed her as much as she missed him.

"Rainbreeze?" The low voice of her mate broke the blue warrior out of her thoughts. She turned her head to face him, purring as he stepped further into the nursery.

"Hey." She meowed softly, nuzzling his cheek as he pressed his to her face. "How was the gathering?"

She had stayed up waiting for him to return, Bramblestorm having promised to relay everything to his mate.

"Intense. Spottedstar is dead. Rat attack. Now Sorrelstar is leading SkyClan, with Stormfall as her deputy." He meowed as he sat beside her, his tail brushing her pelt gently.

"Stormfall? Deputy?" Rainbreeze meowed in surprise, her ears flicking. "He must be so proud."

"He looked nervous. But he seemed happy. ShadowClan announced that their new deputy would be Ashfang. Rainstar changed her deputy, I guess Bristletail stepped down. Now Ravenstorm is her deputy." He shrugged. "I heard Rosecloud of Riverclan and Russetfeather of ShadowClan saying it was because both leaders wanted young, strong warriors."

"They picked good choices. That Ravenstorm is rather peaceful, and Ashfang is known for being more relaxed than even Newtstar." Rainbreeze commented as she stretched. "Did Cinderflame talk to Stormfall?"

"No. When it was announced she acted as if she didn't hear. Do you think she'll ever forgive him?" Bramblestorm meowed lowly, his head tilting curiously.

Rainbreeze sighed; she had hoped that Cinderflame would forgive their brkther in time. But she could see it would take a while longer. "I don't know. She feels as if he betrayed us by leaving. She always wanted us three to be the best warriors for ThunderClan we could be."

"Well, I'm sure she'll be in much better spirits. I've heard her and Tigerfrost debating about having Jaypaw and Hollypaw's apprentice ceremony soon." He meowed, his head tilting.

"Really? Feels as if they were just made apprentices." Rainbreeze meowed softly, her nose twitching. She couldn't believe Hollypaw and Jaypaw would be becoming warriors soon; had it really been that long since they had become apprentices?

"I love you both, but shut up." Mistyrain grumbled from further back, one of her yellow eyes peeking at them from the mound of grey and black fur that made up her and her kits. "I just got these two to settle down."

"Sorry Mistyrain." Brambestorm purred as he moved to lay down closer to Rainbreeze. "We'll be quiet."

"Hmph." The grey queen grunted as she closed her eyes, drifting to sleep again.

Rainbreeze and Bramblestorm shared an amused look as they settled more into the large nest, purring softly as they began to fall asleep.

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"Rainbreeze, watch this!"

"No, watch this!"

The excited voices of Creekkit and Rockkit carried through the den as the two kits wrestled and played, Rainbreeze watching on with an amused purr.

She had volunteered to watch the brothers while Mistyrain and Falconstrike had went on a walk, providing the grey queen a break from her rambunctious kits. Now, she began to understand why Mistyrain enjoyed sleeping so much.

"How about we go into the clearing? I've heard Jaypaw and Hollypaw are almost done with their assessment." She suggested, rising to her paws with a faint grunt. It was beginning to get harder and harder to move around; Ravensight and Snowfall both predicted her having a large litter. She was excited, and so was her family.

Cinderflame had made it a point to visit her every day, bringing her fresh kill and having Hollypaw and Jaypaw make sure her nest was always fresh and lined with feathers as well. Skyfeather had brought by lavender and chamomile to line her nest, citing that it helped calm her when she was expecting kits.

"I see the clan gathering!" Creekkit reported as he rushed to the entrance. "Can we go see? Please?"

"Yeah, please Rainbreeze?" Rockkit meowed earnestly, his ears pinned to his head as he and his brother looked at her with wide eyes.

"Alright come on." She purred, following the two toms out to the camp clearing. The two sat, stretching up as they watched Jaypaw, Hollypaw, Cinderflame and Tigerfrost stand in front of the Tall

Rock, a tired looking Mudstar sitting in front of them.

Rainbreeze tilted her head, eyeing her leader carefully. He looked exhausted: his pelt dull and his tail dropping.

"Mudstar looks worse." Bramblestorm whispered as he sat beside her, stifling a laugh as she looked at him sharply.

"What do you mean?"

"He's been sick for a moon. Nightmist was talking about it with your mother on the border patrol. She thinks he's debating retiring."

"Really?" Rainbreeze meowed. "Can leaders retire?"

"I think so," Bramblestorm started softly, "he would just have to go to StarClan and let them know."

"Hush!" The sharp hiss of Foxfang sounded, his eyes narrowed from where he sat with his mate.

"Sorry." Rainbreeze whispered as she ducked her head, turning to face the front.

"ThunderClan, as most of us are aware, we have two apprentices who passed their assessments with flying colors. Before I continue, I'd like to let their mentors share a word. Cinderflame?" Mudstar called, his voice weary from where Rainbreeze sat.

"Hollypaw is fierce, determined, and a quick learner. During her team hunting, she showed no issue taking charge, and maneuvered herself to where she and Liontail had the best advantage. She will make a wonderful warrior." Cinderflame spoke confidently, her copper eyes full of pride.

"She almost looks like a leader." Bramblestorm whispered, Rainbreeze nodding in agreement.

"Jaypaw is strong, stealthy, and deeply loyal. He was open to suggestion, and took Hawkwhisker's advice into consideration, traits I believe are important and valuable in any warrior. He would be wonderful in the warriors den." Tigerfrost spoke next, before he

turned to dip his head towards Rainbreeze. "Rainbreeze, you were his mentor first, is there any words you'd like to add?" He offered warmly.

A rush of affection welled up in her chest for her sister's mate; he truly was the best choice for Jaypaw.
"Jaypaw was the quiet apprentice," she began, sitting up as the clan turned to look at her. "He and I worked well together because of how similar our approach to things were. He is a fantastic tracker, and I'm proud that he's been trained by a good, kind warrior. I believe he's ready as well."

"Well, then it's settled. Hollypaw, Jaypaw, do you promise to uphold the warrior code, even at the cost of your lives?"

"I do." Hollypaw declared loudly, her tail lashing proudly.

"I do." Jaypaw promised, his voice steady and his ears pricked.

"Then before our ancestors, I commend you as warriors in your turn. From this day forward Hollypaw, In honor of your fierce dedication and spirit, you will be known as Hollystorm." Mudstar announced, letting the clan cheer as he stepped forward to rest his muzzle on Hollystorm's head.

"Jaypaw. In honor of your quiet determination and skill, you will be called Jayfeather." Mudstar finushed, his eyes full of warmth as the new warriors purred loudly. Rainbreeze cheered along, her heart warm as she moved to congratulate the new warrior.

"You'll do well, Jayfeather." She purred, touching g her nose to his cheek affectionately. Jayfeather beamed, nudging her cheek gently.

"I couldn't have done it without you. You will always be the best mentor." Jayfeather meowed, his blue eyes soft.

"Jayfeather!" Petalfrost called, approaching them quickly. Rubbing her cheek against the tom's, Petalfrost looked thrilled, her tail curling happily. "You'll finally be joining me, and the others of course."

"Yeah," Jayfeather meowed, "me and Hollystorm will be able to

spend more time with you and Liontail, and Hawkwhisker as well."

Rainbreeze grinned as she stepped back, leaving the two to speak. Turning around, she paused at the sharp jab in her side, her nose wrinkling as she stiffened.

It started again as she began to move forward, Rainbreeze crouching as she sucked in a sharp breath.

"Rainbreeze?" Cinderflame meowed, approaching swiftly. "What's wrong?"

"I don't know, my stomach hurts." Rainbreeze whimpered as she began to stand straight, just to flinch as another jab formed. "I think the kits are coming."

"Let's get you to the nursery. Tigerfrost, will you get Bramblestorm and Ravensight?" Cinderflame spoke, helping support her sister as she walked her to the nursery, Skyfeather rushing over to help her daughters inside.

Once inside, Rainbreeze collapsed into her nest, her side heaving as she endured the sharp pains in her stomach. Cinderflame sat nearby, her copper eyes full of fire as she waited anxiously. Skyfeather's tongue rasped between Rainbreeze's ears, the action soothing.

"Rainbreeze?" Bramblestorm meowed as he rushed in, his green eyes wide, "how are you feeling my darling?" He crouched beside her, Skyfeather moving out of his way.

"It hurts." She groaned out, her eyes closing tightly as Bramblestorm nuzzled her gently.

"Alright, let's deliver these kits." Ravensight meowed as he entered the den, his tail flicking. "Cinderflame, can you get me a nice thick stick? And Skyfeather, some wet moss please."

"Where's Snowfall? Shouldn't be be here?" Bramblestorm fretted, his eyes wide as Cinderflame and Skyfeather left, "you both said this would be a large litter."

"And it will be. But I am confident we can handle it. Besides, I am your medicine cat as well." Ravensight meowed sharply, placing a paw on Rainbreeze's flank. "Any moment now."

Cinderflame returned first, nudging a thick stick towards her sister, moving to sit a few tail lengths away as Rainbreeze picked the stick up and bit down.

"The first one is coming now." Ravensight meowed, his eyes narrowed. "Get ready to push."

"You can do it love." Bramblestorm promised.

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"That's the last one. Two shekits and two toms." Ravensight meowed as he set the silvery gray shekit next to her siblings, his voice soft.

"Oh Rainbreeze, they're beautiful." Skyfeather purred. "I'm going to go tell your father."

"Alright." Rainbreeze murmured tiredly, her eyes fixed on her kits.

"Have you two figured out names?" Cinderflame meowed, her voice gentle as she moved closer.

Bramblestorm looked full of pride, his eyes happy. "I was hoping you would name one Cinderflame." He spoke, his head tilting.

"Really?" Cinderflame breathed, her eyes flickering between Rainbreeze and Bramblestorm. "You're sure?"

"Of course." Rainbreeze purred.

"Oh wow." Cinderflame meowed as she peered at the kits, her whiskers twitching as she nodded towards the larger of the two toms. "Gorsekit. Look how spiky his fur is, just like yours Bramblestorm."

"Gorsekit is perfect." Rainbreeze purred. "And for the little silver shecat, Moonkit?"

"Can we name the other shekit Willowkit? And the tom, Bristlekit?" Bramblestorm meowed, his head tilting.

"Of course." Rainbreeze meowed happily, her tail curling around their kits.

"I better go see Tigerfrost, I'm sure he's antsy." Cinderflame chuckled.

As she left, Rainbreeze watched her kits squirm closer. Gorsekit did indeed have the same spiky pelt as Bramblestorm; his fur a blue-grey color similar to her own, save for the darker tabby markings rippling through it. Little Moonkit looked almost like Skyfeather in a way, except her tail tip was the only spot on her with any white. Bristlekit looked the most like his father in terms of pelt color; his fur was a light brown, with white paws and a singular darker brown stripe running down his back.
Willowkit was light grey in color, with black tabby markings along her back and tail.

"They're beautiful." She breathed.

"Our kits will be the best warriors in this clan," Bramblestorm meowed. "In all the clans."

She purred happily as she watched her kits with soft eyes, her heart full. '*You will be the best warriors.*'

chapter twenty one

Stormfall sighed in contentment as he stared at the setting sun, pure peace in his heart.

It had been two moons since the news of Rainbreeze giving birth to her and Bramblestorm's kits. He had been granted permission by Mudstar and Sorrelstar to visit, and had been delighted in meeting Willowkit, Gorsekit, Moonkit and Bristlekit. He had also met Mistyrain's kits, Creekpaw and Rockpaw. It had amused him to see how Creekpaw and Willowkit acted with each other; the two were clearly close.

Now Cinderflame was expecting kits with Tigerfrost; an announcement that had initially surprised him to hear. Cinderflame, his proud, ambitious, fierce sister who seemed to tough and distant to even play with kits, was expecting her own. Stormfall was excited for her, and more happy that she and himself had repaired their relationship. He had watched with warmth and pride as she told him and Sandfeather about how Spiderstar had promoted Tigerfrost to deputy following the warrior ceremony of Jayfeather and Hollystorm.

The thought of Sandfeather brought another thread of warmth, Stormfall aware of the light ginger shecat pressed to his side. He felt calm with her at his side; they had been mates officially for a little over a moon now and he still couldn't help the sense of amazement he felt any time she spoke.

"You're thinking rather hard, *deputy*." Sandfeather teased softly. Her green eyes were full of amusement and affection, her whiskers twitching.

"Only about everything that's happened these past moons." Stormfall purred. He had been made deputy when Sorrelstar became leader after Spottedstar's death. It had been terrible; he had been apart of the patrol that had fought the rats with the leader, and he had witnessed her loosing eight of her lives from the rats,

only to loose her final life a few days later. At first he had been completely unprepared, but after speaking with Sorrelstar, Moonwhisker and Russetsky, he felt better.

"Have you decided on who you're going to suggest come to the gathering tonight?" Sandfeather meowed, her tail flicking.

"I think you, Sootwhisker, Twigpelt, Russetsky, Moonfeather, Fernpaw, maybe even Honeypool and Birdheart?" He suggested, his head tilting. "Sparkfire and Nettlefang should stay behind to guard the camp." His own apprentice, Twigpaw, had become a warrior with his littermate, the two becoming Twigpelt and Daisynose. The two had proven to be excellent warriors. The clan had been fortunate, especially in the arrival of Fern, a young rogue who quickly showed an aptitude for being a medicine cat. Moonflower had adopted the shecat as her apprentice, and Fernpaw had become very skilled.

"Wise choices. But I'm afraid tonight may be my last gathering to attend." Sandfeather meowed softly, her paws shuffling.

"Why's that? Planning on retiring early? Spend time with Russetsky?" Stormfall teased, purring as Sandfeather flicked his ear.

"No you furbrain, I'm expecting your kits, not getting old." She huffed, her eyes rolling in mock irritation.

Stormfall froze, his eyes widening as he stared at Sandfeather. "You're..what?" He breathed, his ears pinned to his head. His kits? She was expecting his-?

"Yes. Moonflower confirmed it this morning. I'm expecting kits Stormfall. Aren't you pleased?" She meowed hesitantly, her green eyes darting between him and her paws anxiously.

"Pleased? This is wonderful!" He beamed as he hurried to cover her face in licks, his chest rumbling as he purred. "Us, expecting kits? Wait till I tell Honeypool and Sootwhisker! Till I tell Cinderflame and Rainbreeze and my parents." He was beyond excited; they were having kits! He could see it now, a little sturdy tom with Sandfeather's eyes, or maybe a fierce little shekit with his pelt.

"I hoped you'd be happy. Moonflower and Fernpaw think I should move into the nursery soon." Sandfeather meowed. "Maybe after the gathering."

"Of course. Let's get you back to camp." He purred.

—

The full moon shone brightly upon the cats gathered in the clearing, it's light turning pelts silvery with the glow.

Stormfall led his mate through the crowd, weaving around others until he reached Bramblestorm, Honeypool and a RiverClan shecat by the name of Ashblaze, her speckled pelt groomed neatly.

"Hey!" Bramblestorm greeted, his green eyes friendly, "Honeypool just informed me. Congratulations."

Stormfall grinned proudly, waiting until Sandfeather sat before sitting himself. "Thank you. How are the kits and Rainbreeze?"

"Good, Rainbreeze is a wonderful mother, and our kits are incredible. Gorsekit is very tough and quiet, but he has a kind heart. Little Willowkit is so mild mannered and sweet, but Moonkit is fiercely independent. And Bristlekit is the ringleader for them. He certainly keeps them all in line." Bramblestorm beamed as he spoke of his kits, his chest puffed up proudly.

"My brother Ravenstorm's mate is expecting kits soon." Ashblaze spoke up, her nose twitching. "Hopefully they're better swimmers than he is."

The group chuckled; it was notorious amongst the clan that Ravenstorm disliked swimming, even though he was a RiverClan cat.

"It's starting." Honeypool spoke quietly, nodding to the front of the crowd.

The first to step forward was a lean, spiky furred grey tom, his whiskers twitching. "As you may see, Rainstar has passed on to join our ancestors. I am Bristlestar," he spoke, pausing as the clans called

his name before growing silent. Allowing a few moments to pass in honor of the fallen leader before he continued, "and my deputy is Ravenstorm. RiverClan thanks our ancestors for the good fish, the clean rivers, and our plentiful herbs. We welcome Bluefrost into our nursery expecting Ravenstorm's kits, and we honor Ashblaze,who helped fight off a particularly nasty fox." He finished.

Next to step forward was the dark pelted form of Spiderstar, his Amber eyes full of friendly warmth. "ThunderClan is thriving. Despite loosing Mudstar, we are given a blessing in the form of our kits. Joining the nursery, we have Cinderflame, Petalfrost and Tawnyfrost. Joining the elders' den, Skyfeather, Nightmist, Thistlefang, Lightningtail, Sparrowstrike, Cherrythorn, Sagefern and Larktail. Unfortunately, we must announce the passing of Mossheart, who shared the den as an elder. I must also announce Creekpaw and Rockpaw as our newest apprentices. The prey runs well and the forest peaceful." Spiderstar meowed before stepping backwards, his tail flicking as he nodded for Newtstar to step forward.

"Look at Thornstar, he looks sick." Sandfeather whispered. Stormfall looked towards the WindClan leader; his tawny pelt looked less glossy than normal, his eyes tired.

"He probably is. I'm sure it's been hard on him, having to be leader at his age. He's almost as old as Mossheart." He whispered back.

"..runs well. Sorrelstar, would you like to go next?" Newtstar finished, his eyes gentle as he stepped backwards.

"Thank you," Stormfall's chest filled with pride as his leader moved to address the clans. "I am now Sorrelstar, leader of SkyClan. Joining me, is my deputy Stormfall. I am pleased to announce that we have two new warriors, Twigpelt and Daisynose, along with our new medicine cat apprentice, Fernpaw. SkyClan is doing wonderful and I'm pleased about our success." Sorrelstar stepped back, nodding as Thornstar stepped forward shakily.

"WindClan is fine. Nothing to report." He meowed before turning his back and leaving. Stormfall traded a confused look with Sandfeather, mirroring the look of concern on his mate's face.

"Let us enjoy the night for a while longer." Bristlestar spoke up, his tail tip twitching as he eyed Thornstar warily.

"Stormfall, this is Fernpelt, my mate." Ashblaze meowed, purring as a pretty golden shecat padded forward. Stormfall glanced at Sandfeather, noting how his mate greeted the new shecat politely.

"It's nice to meet you." He meowed, watching as the two shecat's pressed against each other. Fernpelt was everything Ashblaze wasn't; where Ashblaze's Grey fur was littered with scars, Fernpelt's looked unblemished. Where the gray shecat had cold amber eyes, Fernpelt's were a soft yellow. The two shecats seemed to be complete opposites, but also completely in love.

"You as well," Fernpelt spoke, her ear flicking as she flashed a kind smile.

"If you'll excuse me, I think I see someone I know from ShadowClan." He meowed as he excused himself, turning and walking away. Behind him, he could hear the three shecats beginning to talk, Ashblaze's voice notably warmer than before.

"Stormfall, is it?" A gruff sounding voice sounded from a few steps away, Stormfall turning to see the speaker. Standing before him was a thin, scruffy looking tom, his pelt a pale brown and his eyes narrowed. "My sister speaks of you often."

"And you are?" Stormfall spoke, his tail flicking.

"You should keep your clan to your own borders. ShadowClan wont take kindly to tresspassers." He answered instead, pushing past Stormfall. "Otherwise accidents could happen."

Stormfall stared after the tom, his tail lashing. '*What was his problem?'*

Shaking his head to clear his thoughts, Stormfall continued towards a group of warriors, noticing Russetfeather and Petalbreeze of ShadowClan, along with Rocktail of WindClan and Liontail of RiverClan. Rocktail and Liontail looked almost alike; both with black fur and green eyes, although Liontail's pelt was sleeker and

Rocktail had bulkier shoulders. "Hello."

"Hey, congrats on being made deputy." Russetfeather meowed brightly, his whiskers twitching. Stormfall liked the tom; he was even tempered and fairly kind to most everyone. His mate Petalbreeze was known for having a sharp tongue; a trait inherited by her now passed mother, Dawnstar.

"Thank you." He dipped his head, blinking a greeting towards the others.

Liontail nodded back, as Rocktail paused in his story to flash a quick smile. Stormfall sat down, his tail curling over his paws neatly.

"So Stormfall, are you liking being deputy?" Russetfeather asked, his head tilting.

"Yeah, it's a bit overwhelming at first, but it's getting easier. I'm fortunate that I have several of our warriors along with Sorrelstar and Russetsky to help me along. Honestly it helps to know I have my clan's support." Stormfall answered. His weight shifted as he shuffled his paws, aware of Liontail joining their conversation.

"So you feel pretty secure in SkyClan, despite being born in ThunderClan?" Liontail meowed, his eyes narrowing slightly as he spoke.

"Yes actually. I was born in ThunderClan, but I never truly felt at home. I felt as if I was constantly competing to be better than my grandfather Stormpelt, like I *had* to be better than him. But in SkyClan, I feel as if I'm finally where I belong. SkyClan feels as if I'm home for the first time." Stormfall meowed, his voice low but determined as he eyed Liontail, "SkyClan is my home, and I love it."

"And we adore him." Sandfeather's voice sounded over his shoulder, her scent washing over his senses as he relaxed. "He's a good deputy, and a wonderful hunter, even if he sometimes lumbers around like a badger."

The gathered cats laughed, their whiskers twitching and amused

purrs sounding as Stormfall grinned at his mate, thankful for Sandfeather's humor to dispel the tension.

"Are you picking on the deputy again?" Honeypool's amused voice sounded from across the circle, her blue eyes full of humor as she padded forward to sit beside Rocktail.

"He needs it." Sandfeather shrugged, prompting another round of amused chuckles.

"Whatever featherbrain. Sorrelstar is calling for us all to come and get ready to leave, she feels like we should start heading home." Honeypool meowed, her whiskers twitching in amusement at her clanmates' antics.

Rising to his paws, Stormfall meowed a goodbye as he followed Sandfeather and Honeypool towards their clan, his ear flicking as he moved to stand beside Sorrelstar, smiling at his leader warmly.

"We really did it, didn't we?" Sorrelstar meowed as she looked at their clan gathering, her eyes traveling from the SkyClan group to look at the other clans. "We brought SkyClan to the lake, and we took our home back." She sounded proud, her eyes full of happiness.

Stormfall nodded, his chest feeling warm. They had done it. The clans were five once more, and the lake remained peaceful. "Yeah, yeah we did."

Epilogue

The mist curled around the edge of the clearing as Cinderflame stood before her mentor, her silver tabby tail flicking.

"I can't train with you any longer. I'm expecting kits now, I have to think of them, of their safety." She spoke bravely, watching as Duskheart sighed. Cinderflame had been nervous at the thought of telling her mentor; he had always seemed too harsh to care about something like this.

"I understand. I wish I could have taught you more, but to bring new warriors into the clan is to better the clan. And now that your mate is deputy, these kits will be more respected than any other." Duskheart meowed, noting the look of surprise on his former apprentice's face.

"Thank you for everything. You truly made me a better warrior." Cinderflame meowed.

"You were an eager apprentice. If you ever return, I will be glad to show you more. And perhaps you may train another one here alongside me." Duskheart meowed, a note of warmth barely heard as he watched Cinderflame fade.

"Expecting kits? What a waste." The cold, low voice of Cherryfang sounded behind him, the ginger shecat padding to stand at his shoulder.

"She brings new warriors to the clan, new apprentices for us. Besides, I will wait and bide my time. I have another new apprentice in mind." The image of a ginger furred kit appeared in his mind, her blue eyes curious and wide as she looked around.

"Training a kit from SkyClan?" Cherryfang purred lowly. "One that hasn't even been born yet?"

"Doesn't matter. StarClan may be able to make prophecies, but I am able to see what can affect those. This kit will be able to do as I please, and be as ruthless and merciless as I train them to be, and those starry fools

will never see it coming." Duskheart purred darkly, "the end of the stars is near."

•••

Heatherheart sighed in relief as she looked towards her siblings. "Duskheart has lost his control over Cinderflame. But I fear he may have darker plans in store for the clans."

Willowstep looked at her sister sadly, her green eyes full of empathy as their brother, Finchwatcher, sighed. The tom, who died as Finchkit, now bore a warrior name, his silvery tabby pelt smooth and his body lean.

"We should send a new prophecy. A better one to protect the clans. The clans must learn to fight together, before the darkness takes over the lake." Finchwatcher advised.

"The end of the stars is near, if the clans do not stand United, all else will fail. There will be two, kin of my kin, who will lead the clans against the darkness. But be warned, even the purest heart can get tainted and the bravest soul can falter." Willowstep murmured, the three siblings staring down into the pool of blowing moon-pool water below, the faint image of two kits playing reflected in the water.

"They will save our clans."